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**S T. R O C H E.**

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**VOL. II.**







Aunt Anne objects to Corney's going to Foreign Parts

Pauly, Léonie, 1801-1861

# S T. R O C H E.

A Romance,

FROM THE GERMAN.

EDITED BY

JAMES MORIER, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF "HAJJI BABA," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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## ST. ROCHE.

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### CHAPTER I.

WHEN Lionel prepared, on the following morning, to go to his mother, he was more fully resolved than he had ever yet been to inform her of his union with Flora, and entreat her advice and assistance in declaring his marriage. He felt more satisfied with himself, and in better spirits, in consequence of this resolution, and the expression of his countenance had acquired dignity and composure. On entering the room where the maréchale passed her mornings, he found her reclining in an arm-chair in the middle of the room, near to the window, at which, on a raised seat, sat Mademoiselle Louise, dressed in thin light drapery, her hair partly unloosed, and fancifully adorned with flowers. Opposite to her sat a young man with a pallet and brushes, who was finishing a large portrait of her. The maréchale gave but one glance at her son, and instantly divined that he was intending to make disclosures that day which she was determined not to hear. She therefore immediately began talking in an earnest tone of voice, in order to make her

son believe that she was in the middle of a conversation, and merely put out her hand to welcome him, with a smile.

“ I assure you, my good Lesueur, your perpetual quarrels with poor Le Brun are the result of mere fancies ; he has not the slightest intention to undermine you with the king. Yesterday evening only, his majesty said that he had heard of the beautiful portrait you had painted of my daughter, and I obtained permission to have the honour of exhibiting it to him.”

Lesueur received this intelligence with evident delight. He bowed low to the maréchale, and Lionel had now an opportunity of approaching the renowned artist, whose admired paintings from the life of St. Bruno, for the Carthusian convent at Paris, had raised him to a rivalry with Le Bran, the splendid genius who had hitherto suffered no competitor. But the unhealthy hue of Lesueur’s face already announced the disease which so early terminated his life. His cheeks were sunk, and two bright red spots under his eyes, contrasting strongly with the sallow colour of his skin, too surely betrayed his malady. No one could behold this noble victim of indefatigable labour without sympathy and esteem. Those large expressive dark eyes appeared to bewail the want of physical power to embody the creations of his fertile genius. His thin and slender figure was prematurely bowed, and his clothes, hanging loosely upon him, did not conceal the ravages which illness had already made. His voice was hoarse, weak, and low ; the slightest thing alarmed him, and filled him with nervous

fancies. He thought himself injured and ill-used; he mistook his success, and fancied that nobody appreciated him or did him justice. Le Brun had, indeed, done much to injure, and nothing to serve him, which it would have been easy for him to do, as he was then the fashionable painter, whose name was oracular. It released the public from the trouble of judging for themselves, and emboldened them to admire, without the necessity of accounting for their admiration; for the name of Le Brun compensated their deficiency of judgment.

Lesueur had just been complaining to Madame de Crécy of the persecutions of Le Brun,—his morbid state of mind confounding real and imaginary grievances; and that sagacious lady, following the prevailing fashion of protecting artists and learned men, had been using all her eloquence to soothe and encourage him.

“Come here, my dear,” said she to her son, “and lose no time in making the agreeable acquaintance of our renowned Lesueur, and then admire the charming picture of your sister, for which we have to thank him.”

Lionel obeyed with all his natural kindness and cordiality of manner, which gratified and pleased the artist; but still more pleased was he by the ~~distancies~~ with which Lionel admired the portrait of his dear sister, which, though according to the taste of the time, rather fantastic in composition, could not fail to pass among contemporaries for a master-piece. He invited Lesueur to return to his work, and sat down by his side, watching with interest the progress of the painting.

“And that man, whom you justly admire so much, Lionel,” continued the maréchale in a protecting tone, “would you believe it, has kept me employed all the morning in combating his foolish fancies; for he has taken it into his head that Le Brun was the cause of the king’s not allowing his fine mythological pictures for the Hôtel Lambert to be hung in the Louvre.”

“Ah, madame,” said Lesueur, with a sigh, “you are too good to have any idea of the wickedness of men. The Duc de la Rochefoucault had been fully persuaded he should obtain the king’s consent; but he suddenly became silent upon the affair, and at last only shrugged his shoulders. What could that signify, but that he did not choose to tell me the real cause?”

“That’s a mere fancy, and proves nothing at all. The duke might have as many reasons for his silence, as his majesty for his refusal.”

“Yes,” said Lesueur, eagerly; “but Le Beaume, his majesty’s groom of the bedchamber, told me that Le Brun had had an audience of the king that day. His majesty would probably have asked his opinion of the merit of the paintings, and Le Brun pronounced them unworthy of the honour of being placed in the Louvre.”

“Well!” exclaimed the maréchale, laughing, “a wilful man may contrive to maintain weak opinions by sound reasons. Does it not sound as if he were right? And yet it is not the fact. Of that I am sure. I will get at the truth, you may depend upon it. And if it should be as you think, I will obtain satisfaction for you. You

shall not have the addition of grief and mortification to prey upon your heart ! ”

“ Ah ! ” sighed Lesueur, “ they have already made such ravages there, that help will come too late, I am afraid. I am publicly ridiculed, despised, and have barely a footing at court ; for the rumour of this intended honour had already spread, and I had received congratulations upon it. Would to God that I were far away from Paris ! The very stones in the streets seem to look at me, and I tremble to meet an acquaintance ! ”

The sick artist sank back exhausted in his chair, and great drops of perspiration stood upon his brow. The maréchale replied, “ In truth, Lesueur, it would be much better that you should leave Paris for some time ; and, instead of labouring at your profession, have some enjoyment of country air, which, notwithstanding the lateness of the season, the mildness of this winter might afford you. Adopt my plan, and I will give orders to my bailiff to prepare my castle at Monçay for your reception. Go there, and ride, and hunt. You are indeed ill, and your complaint is a Paris-Louvre-Le Brun fever ; and, to get rid of it, you must run away ! ”

Lesueur was so deeply affected, that he could not trust his voice. He continued, therefore, to work in silence ; and had he been able to render the angelic expression of Louise’s sympathising eyes at that moment, that picture alone might have immortalised him.

Lionel was quite fascinated by the talent of the artist ; and the longer he contemplated the picture,

—in which Louise seemed to live on the canvass, in all her youth and beauty, and sweet expression,—and thought that any one unacquainted with the original must be captivated by her loveliness, the more ardently did he wish that he possessed such a picture of Flora; and a hope, that by these means he might give a favourable impression of her to his mother, strengthened his desire. With this end in view, he sought to engage Lesueur in conversation, and to win his confidence, in which he found no difficulty. Morbidly irritable from disease, he was but the more susceptible of kindness, which was quite in accordance with his own nature. He possessed a refined and poetical imagination, with a perfect knowledge of classical art; and although he had never been out of France—hardly ever had left Paris—by means of copies and engravings, he was well versed in the Italian school. He worshiped Raphael as his patron saint, and he believed that in these last mythological paintings he had evinced the success of his studies.

When the sitting was over, Lionel accompanied him out of the room, and persuaded him to come to his apartment, using as a pretext, that he would order his carriage to take him home, as he was evidently exhausted. There he reverted to the maréchale's plan for Lesueur's going into the country, and proposed to him to choose St. Roche instead of Monçay, and there to vary and divide his time between wanderings out of doors and a work which he intended he should execute for him. Lesueur was enchanted by Lionel's plan, and full of anxiety to leave Paris. The portrait of Mademoiselle Louise

was finished ; no other work detained him, and before they separated, he gave his promise to Lionel. The departure of the servant was deferred for a day, that he might escort Lesueur to St. Roche, and attend him with all the care that his state of health required.

“ What the work is that you are to do there, you shall be informed by a letter, which you must read on the road,” added Lionel, with a smile ; “ and rest assured that the subject is one which will inspire you.” In this letter he did not deny that Flora was his wife, but enjoined him to the strictest secrecy.

As soon as he had arranged everything regarding the journey with his trusty servant, he felt inclined to return to his mother. The maréchale had not expected he would return, and, for a moment, was surprised and put out ; for she saw that he adhered to his resolution of forcing his confidence upon her, and that she must devise some other means to prevent him.

“ Well, my dear, are you come now to receive some gentle chastisement from your mother ?” said she.

“ If my dear mother will have the goodness to tell me wherein I have offended her,” he replied, innocently ; and encouraged by the slightest possible smile on those cold, reserved lips, he sat down by her side, his looks and manner full of tenderness.

“ Well,” said the maréchale, “ my blame will be but the confirmation of the fact, that France is the most perfect country on earth ; that one may

have visited every other country and court, and yet appear a novice at our court, and have to go to school afresh."

She looked on the ground straight before her as she spoke, apparently quite unmoved ; but it did not escape her observation that Lionel turned scarlet, and that his eyes flashed with displeasure.

"I am grieved, and, let me add, astonished, that I should have brought upon myself such reflections as these!" he answered, after a pause. "Constrained and uneasy I have certainly felt at court ; but this appeared no crime to me, or at least, if it were, others were equally in fault."

"That is the very thing, my dear. You allow yourself to be imposed upon ; you have no command over yourself—no presence of mind. In one word, your manner is not dignified. A gentleman should never lose his self-possession under any circumstances. He should always appear easy and at home ; he should possess a degree of graceful confidence, which may make him sufficient to himself, and attractive to others. You must never think of seeking such and such a person : you must take your own station, and wait for others to seek you. In order to which, you should at first be cold and reserved, that no one may find out what are your opinions, without drawing closer to investigate them ; then you will be secure of an opportunity to express them, which you should do decidedly, without hesitation, and heedless of opposition. You must make up your mind beforehand how you expect to be met by others, and in what manner you will meet them in return. If

you should make any mistakes, it is of no importance—errors are better than hesitation; and if you take your ground boldly at first, and should afterwards wish to change, the right will be accorded you to be as capricious as you please."

Perhaps it was the guardian angel of Flora that now flew to her aid; for Lionel's heart sank within him as he saw unfolded the part he was to play in order to gain the approbation of his mother.

"Madam," said he, coldly, "I fear I shall never be a gentleman according to your views."

"That is a mere fancy, my dear," replied his mother, calmly. "You will very soon see that this is the only way to raise yourself above the common herd, and that all who, like you, have a great name to keep up, adopt this line of conduct: and I am persuaded that you will also adopt it,—aye, and that you would have found it out for yourself, without any advice from me; but, in the meantime, I should have been sorry to witness the process; it would also have caused some delay, and people would have ceased to interest themselves about your *début*, and thus an advantage would be lost which you could never regain."

Although Lionel had felt dissatisfied with his own conduct, it was less from mortified vanity than from a consciousness of having been led astray contrary to his better judgment. Here, however, he found himself unexpectedly stripped of all the privileges which, in his hereditary pride of birth, he thought were ensured to him; and he strove in vain to call his better principles to his aid, to heal the strokes which so sorely wounded his vanity.

The maréchale, after a short pause, proceeded :—

“ There is a restlessness in your movements, an alternation of graciousness and of ill-humour in your looks. You allow yourself to be presented first to one and then to another, without any discrimination. M. de Fénélon is far beneath you in rank, and I reproved M. de Dreux for having introduced you. You gave the king an answer fit for the stage only : your reply to Madame was excessively inconsiderate ; and one never makes any reply to the king, unless a question is distinctly put. But, enough ! my object in making you travel, which was to give you more ease and self-reliance, has not been attained. One would think that you had not lived in good society latterly ; at least, I feel persuaded, that, had you entered the world under the immediate influence of habits acquired in this house, you would have been less wanting in tact and self-possession. However, I am ready to admit that the sight of our magnificent monarch, and all the greatness that surrounds him, is quite sufficient to confuse and bewilder you at first.”

“ I am not sensible of having felt bewildered in the degree that you seem to suppose,” replied Lionel, endeavouring to control his voice, which trembled with displeasure. “ If I do you so little credit, as from this first trial is to be apprehended, it will be much better that I should follow my own inclination to live to myself, and quit a place and mode of life for which I appear so little suited.”

The maréchale laughed aloud.

“ Well, I am delighted to find that the hot blood of the Crécy shews itself in you, and that at the first slight correction your vanity meets with you are ready to start from the course. That enchant me!—and, even if you should enter the lists against your own mother for an affront offered you, it will not vex me. A mother is so often the victim of her affection for her children, that she does not shrink even from the chastisements which those children may inflict upon her. You are not seriously angry with your mother, Lionel ?” said she, smiling affectionately, and extending her hand to him.

This sudden relaxation from harshness and severity into maternal tenderness was irresistible to Lionel. He felt his heart released from the struggles of indignation, and the blood flowed warmly back to it. Though he had maintained his own judgment firmly against her attacks, it lost its steadiness the moment she appealed to his affection ; and he gave way before this display of tenderness.

“ Oh, my mother !” he exclaimed, kissing her proffered hand, “ who could misconstrue your never-varying affection, your immeasurable superiority ? Forgive my warmth, which was naturally caused by the fear of having displeased you ; but allow me to say, not from any feeling of pique, but in serious earnest, I fear I shall never be able to fulfil demands which require the surrender of all my opinions.”

“ Regulate your opinions according to your station, in the first place, and then it will not be

necessary you should give them up at all. You do not properly understand this yet, and this it is that occasions the contest of feelings which irritates you ; you have been drawn aside by trivial youthful fancies, and you want strength to shake them off."

Here she was interrupted by Lionel's eagerly exclaiming, " Call not that to which your words allude a youthful fancy, mother. It is that in which my life is bound up,—the most serious, the deepest feeling of my heart,—which you must foster, as a mother, if you wish to see your son happy."

He hoped to have made a great step, and waited in the expectation that she would now come to his help, and facilitate the disclosure of his marriage to her. But the maréchale was angry with herself and with him, that things should have advanced so far, and thought only how to repel his further confidences, and shake his convictions. Before she had time to arrange her ideas enough to speak, however, Lionel, mistaking her silence, had sunk at her feet.

" I know," said he, with deep emotion, " I know that you have been informed of everything. Souvré has kept nothing back from you. He could not,—he ought not. If I acted hastily, perhaps rashly, yet have I done nothing disgraceful to myself ; and by the tie I have formed have secured my happiness, and brightened my future."

The maréchale was ready to burst with rage. She was so conscious of the passion that flashed in her eyes that she turned them away, lest it should

appear how much importance she attached to this communication.

“ We will not think too seriously, my son, of the affair which Souvré certainly did mention to me. It would have been better had you let the subject rest, for it is not a fitting one for you to discuss with your mother, a woman of such unimpeachable character, and of such strict decorum, that she has always eluded any relations of the errors of those of her own sex in an inferior station. Though I could have wished to preserve your morals pure in this respect, yet I have the weakness of a mother, who is disposed not only to forgive, but to attribute a considerable share of the blame to the strength of the temptation. I can, moreover, give you the comfortable assurance that your father has been kept in entire ignorance of this youthful folly, and that we shall certainly find it easy still to prevent its reaching his ears. In the event of his discovering it, his ungovernable temper would cause some unhappy hours both to you and to me.”

Lionel made several attempts during this speech to interrupt his mother, but in vain ; he was compelled to listen to the view which she took of his connexion, and to feel the full extent of his unhappy position.

“ Good heavens ! my dearest mother, where can you have taken up such erroneous ideas concerning this connexion, that you put it in so disgraceful a light ? Have you not been told that it was consecrated by a holy rite, and free from every stain of immorality ?”

“I entreat you, my dear Lionel, not to mention that strange farce by which your inexperienced youth was taken in,” said the maréchale, struggling for composure. “Although it is revolting to use any church forms, even the invalid ones of a heretical sect, in cases which our own holy offices cannot legitimately sanction; yet in this instance we may thank God, that, owing to your age, and the absence of your parents, nothing the least like a binding engagement can accrue from so unwarrantable a profanation; and that, therefore, it is unnecessary to take any serious steps for the restoration of your liberty. But I entreat, that if you are now thinking of breaking off this connexion, you will do it in a manner which, even in affairs of this nature, is due to your rank. You have ample means of your own; and you may draw upon my purse to any amount.”

“No, no; I cannot bear this!” cried Lionel, almost in a frenzy. “Hear me! for God’s sake listen to me, if you would not kill me! You are under a mistake,—under a fearful mistake. Let me tell you everything, and then let me depart from a spot to which I am so ill suited, and where I am rejected by all that is of any worth to me.”

“Gently, Lionel; you are not speaking to me in a proper manner. Louise, get up, and remind your brother that you are in the room, and that this conversation is not a fit one to carry on in your presence. Let us avoid a discussion, which must necessarily put us out of temper.”

“Oh, how can you speak thus of an affair which involves the happiness of my life? Dearest mo-

ther! do not throw me off in this way. Louise, my sister, intercede for your brother, if you would not see him miserable, and an alien from all he loves!"

Louise burst into tears, and threw herself into his arms, as if she would with her delicate little form shield him from every assault upon his happiness.

"Be calm, Lionel. You will not, you cannot be unhappy. No, no; our mother will protect you—will save you!"

"How can you excuse yourself for having occasioned such a scene?" said the maréchale, rising with dignity. "Louise, you forget that Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières is expecting you."

"Do not leave me," cried Lionel, gently disengaging the weeping Louise from his arms, and placing her in a chair. "My honour and my duty require me to entreat you to give me a hearing; for the greater part of your displeasure is founded upon your ignorance of the facts."

"Not to-day, Lionel," replied the maréchale, in a tone of exhaustion. "I feel that I require rest. I must beg you to spare me now."

"I am at your command. If you will not deny me an audience, and will withhold your judgment until it has taken place, I will wait patiently and respectfully till you feel disposed to listen to me."

The maréchale made no reply; but Lionel thought her silence was favourable, and derived a slight hope from it, which was his only comfort after the fearful overthrow he had experienced.

But this interview, for which he so anxiously awaited a summons, never took place. Another appeal on his part failed; and only made matters worse, as she contrived to insinuate that she considered the affair disposed of long ago, and too insignificant to revert to. The old marshal became more urgent in pressing a marriage which he had much at heart for his son; and, although the maréchale inwardly rejoiced at hearing projects laid before him which must be fatal to his hopes, she, with infinite skill, always gave to her conduct an appearance of mediating protection, which gained for her Lionel's silent gratitude. His conduct in public had in the meantime taken the turn which, led by his vanity, seemed to weaken the cause of the maréchale's reproaches. Her house was open daily to the select society that she was in the habit of receiving. Lionel had become acquainted with those persons who formed the court; and, without his being aware of it, (or else he would not confess it to himself,) the portrait which his mother had sketched of a finished gentleman had taken hold of his imagination, and by degrees became more apparent in his manner. He felt relieved, his position less irksome; and, without any inquiry as to whither this path would lead him, he lived on as he found most easy at the present moment.

After some time it was announced that the queen would hold a drawing-room, and give a grand ball immediately afterwards. She had been unwell ever since the occurrence already mentioned at the Hôtel Biron, and the king had devoted his

tenderest attentions to her. The connexion with Madame de Lavallière was talked of certainly, but only in whispers, and with an indulgence which lent to it a character of romantic sentiment—a degree of propriety which shewed the power the king was able to exercise over the most firmly-rooted principles.

The modest and unassuming conduct of Madame de Lavallière contributed to keep up this character; she declined all display and distinction. It was whispered that at this drawing-room she was to take her place as duchess, for the first time, the king having lately raised her to this rank almost by force, adding to this mark of distinction the gift of the Hôtel Biron; and it was confidently asserted, that the queen, touched by the affection shewn to her by her husband, had consented to receive her as duchess, with all the rights and privileges belonging to that rank.

All who were entitled to appear before the queen, crowded in immense numbers to this scene, and it was no trifling business to establish the order of precedence, and assign to every one the place befitting his rank.

The marshal, too, had broken forth from his confinement, that he might, once at least, see his beloved son in the presence of his sovereign. He set out first with him; and the maréchale and Louise, who followed them, had not yet arrived, when the esquires in advance appeared, and announced Anne of Austria, the king's mother, who immediately entered with the greatest pomp, followed by her whole court. The time which had

elapsed since the death of Mazarin had mitigated the feelings of aversion which, in former days, attended her appearance. The very high regard, and filial respect, with which the king always treated his mother, left to others no alternative as to their conduct. Anne of Austria, who was not wanting in quickness of understanding, and whose unfortunate and extraordinary connexions found some extenuation in the fact of being the wife of Louis XIII., now maintained so honourable a situation, that in all the concerns of her children, as well as those of the court, she exerted her maternal influence, and by her wise and judicious dealings was instrumental in the adjustment of their dissensions. She had lately persuaded the queen to adopt this mild course towards Madame de Lavallière; and the generous, gentle, and affectionate Maria Theresa had struggled to subdue this new sorrow, ever hoping by these means to bring back the king at some future time to herself. On this account it was that Anne had now preceded her son, in the kind intention of encouraging the queen by her presence. She, therefore, merely bowed to the numerous assembly in passing by;—when, however, she perceived the Marshal de Crécy-Chabanne, whose striking appearance was not easily overlooked, she stopped and nodded to him in a friendly way.

“I am delighted, marshal, to find you here in the foremost rank at court, as in battle formerly!” She spoke in a loud and hearty voice, and approached him, looking all the time, not at the father, but at the son, whose youth and beauty

fully justified her curiosity. "But I perceive that you have brought with you a prop to support you if you should be fatigued. You are welcome, young man! I have been told that your travels have not been unprofitable, and that you have cultivated your understanding. This is praiseworthy, and will not be overlooked by his majesty. I, too, shall be mindful of it."

"Permit me to recommend him to your majesty!" said the marshal, highly delighted at the greeting of his old mistress. "I hope he will not disgrace the name that your majesty has so often distinguished."

"Yes, yes, marshal, we have often held counsel together," continued the queen, pleased at being reminded by him of her former power at the time of the regency: "you were always hot-headed, and when once you had drawn the sword, threw the scabbard away; but you never sought to recover it before your queen had obtained her rights."

"How could I otherwise have shewn my sense of the honour of serving your majesty? Besides, the right was always on our side."

"So it was," replied Anne; "and I knew how to reward you for it, did not I? The heiress, and loveliest young lady at court—Mademoiselle de Soubise—became your bride."

"Your majesty always knew how to conduct such important transactions in the most perfect manner. I was proud of being able to say, 'This match was made by my queen herself!'"

"Yes, yes," said Anne, with a smile; "we set

some value upon our marshal ! And I have half a mind to try again on the son what answered so well with the father. What say you, young man ? I hope you are not an unmoved spectator of the beauties at our court ! ”

“ Who could remain an unmoved spectator at this court, where each day affords us some fresh specimen of unfading beauty combined with the most exalted intellect ? No one has time here to attend to the interests of his own heart ! ”

“ So ! ” replied the queen, not hesitating to accept his ready answer as a tribute to herself ; “ well, then, I will find time to make a good choice for you.”

Lionel was silent ; but the marshal was so loud in his ecstasies of delight, that the queen, smiling good-naturedly at the old warrior, left him, and proceeded to the inner rooms.

Meantime, the maréchale, with Louise by her side, had arrived, and heard the end of this scene : fixed in her place, she could not only observe, but had also time to form plans accordingly. At that moment the king was announced, and the queen left her place by the side of her mother-in-law in the inner room, to receive her husband in the audience-chamber. There Lionel saw the queen for the first time, and with that first glance his heart was devoted to her for ever.

Maria Theresa, the daughter of Philip IV. of Spain, was adored by all about her, and her amiable and noble character fully justified this affection. She would have been handsome had she been taller ; for the only defect in her face was

the thickness of her lips, a peculiarity belonging to her family, the rest of her features being perfectly regular. Her fine fair hair, and the delicate complexion which assimilated so well with it, were much to be admired. Her eyes were large and blue, with an intelligent and animated expression, and upheld the air of dignity which, on all public occasions, she had so perfectly at command. Her passionate love for her husband overcame all the trials to which the infidelities of the king subjected her, and secured to this union both affection and dignified decorum; for he always returned with good-will and increased esteem to his wife, who never sought to gain by importunity affections over which she possessed such just claims, and whose reproaches consisted almost exclusively in the agitation manifested in her joy at his return. But the deep grief which her unrequited affection spread over her solitary hours, shewed to the few confidential witnesses how keenly she could suffer.

When the king entered, and, between the two queens, proceeded to the apartments of his wife, he appeared very different from what he had done when Lionel had seen him before; for here he was the monarch only.

The queens, although both conspicuous for the dignity of their demeanour and splendour of their attire, passed unobserved by the side of Louis. Lionel remarked a change of colour, and slight convulsion on the face of his father, who vainly endeavoured to master his emotion when the king went by;—his eagle eye glanced at the old man, and he recognised him by a slight motion of the

head. Lionel was scarcely less agitated, for nothing is more affecting than to witness the emotion of a parent.

The royal family had taken their places; the king alone stood and surveyed the brilliant assembly, cautiously measuring his words, as every one came up to offer his homage and make his deep obeisance, and then hastened back to take the place which his rank accorded to him, either sitting or standing. All the gradations of etiquette were scrupulously attended to; for to be well versed in these points, was considered an essential qualification for court office, and their strict observance mainly contributed to the order and dignity of the brilliant scene.

The Marshal de Crécy now hastened forward to approach his sovereign, in a state of agitation which made him forcibly grasp the hand of his son. Louis seeing the old veteran about to bend his knee, prevented, with his extended hand, this act of homage, so difficult at his advanced age, and addressed him in the kindest manner.

“Madam,” said he to the queen, “you must be graciously pleased to receive the son of our brave marshal,—the young Count de Crécy-Chabanne,—without further ceremony, as an old acquaintance.”

The king hereupon slightly waved his hand, and, though the motion was scarcely perceptible, it was not to be misunderstood. Lionel bent the knee before the queen, and kissed the hem of her gown; whereupon she extended to him the tips of her fingers, and bid him rise.

“You are welcome,” said she, mildly. “We

are delighted to receive at our court the son of parents so distinguished ; neither will we oppose your wishes, which have been already revealed to us ; but, on the contrary, will do all in our power to promote them."

Although Lionel did not comprehend the meaning of these words, there was a kindness and a charm in the tone in which they were uttered, which enchanted him. He ventured to look up, and let her see the expression of admiration which animated his countenance.

With a gracious smile she turned from him to greet others, and he then first perceived Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières, who stood behind the queen's chair, like a lovely statue of Carrara marble, the only evidence of animation being the glance of her large and brilliant eyes, which seemed to scan all that passed with the shrewdest observation. They fell upon him too, and a momentary emotion, which made her beautiful eyelids drop, shewed that the sight of him awoke in her peculiar recollections. Fénélon was standing near her ; and when Lionel drew back, he perceived that he looked at him, and addressed a few words to her, to which she replied without any change of posture or countenance, and then Fénélon withdrew.

Lionel was beginning to get tired of the long duration of the presentations, during which time everybody was obliged to remain fixed in one place, and was disposed to find fault with it all, as unnatural and overstrained, when he was suddenly interrupted by the calm and musical voice of Fénélon, who, having reached his side, greeted him.

“ Is this your first appearance at the court of our good queen ? ” said he. “ If I am not mistaken, you have enjoyed the favour of being received without any of the forms.”

“ Yes ; his majesty intended it as a compliment to my father,” answered Lionel. “ I understand that this is considered as a favour. One must have a somewhat longer experience of courts to appreciate these refinements. To me it appeared the most simple thing in the world, that my father should be allowed the right of presenting me.”

“ It does appear so, certainly,” said Fénélon, with a smile. “ Some small extravagances will be easily discovered in a system which teaches us to confine our feelings within impassable bounds ; but I think that the self-control which this necessitates must at times be very wholesome. I see here many whose early life and pursuits have been passed without any idea of restraint, now compelled to submit to it for the sake of maintaining their privileges at court. These persons thus acquire a slight knowledge of that most essential of virtues—*self-control*.”

“ But you,” replied Lionel, “ who have taken so simple and so exalted a view of life, that you court its most laborious avocations to fulfil your duties as a man and a clergyman, what contempt must you feel for these vain and idle ceremonies ! how perfectly can I, in these rooms, understand your resolution of abandoning them ! ”

“ Is that your impression of the scene before us ? ” replied the young clergyman, with a shade of astonishment. “ I did not expect it,” added he,

thoughtfully, "and cannot share in your feeling. To me it appears that a thing is valuable in proportion to its efficacy for attaining a proposed object. Inasmuch as the brilliant scene before us serves to keep up the splendour and dignity of so important, so sublime a station as the throne occupies in the fabric of human society, and inasmuch as it acts upon the minds of men in such a manner as to assist this purpose, the intention appears to me to be fulfilled, and the ceremonies to have their value."

"But," said Lionel, "can you, without regret, see yourself mixed up with the crowd for such a purpose, without the possibility of preserving your unemployed mind from lassitude, (since your education has exempted you from the work which may furnish mental occupation to others, of taming unruly inclinations,) and sinking you to the level of a mere machine?"

"I do not feel this lassitude," answered Fénélon, quietly; "I find amusement here, and am neither wearied nor discontented. These beautiful and brilliantly lighted rooms, the decoration of which shews the great progress of art and industry in my native land, cheer my heart and occupy my mind. I always return with redoubled loyalty to the presence of our beloved king, whose intellect and high acquirements have called these things into existence; and I see this young and handsome monarch in the midst of the representatives of ancient and renowned names, and can read upon every face the expression of reverence with which a great mind is always regarded by others. Thus

I rejoice in the high capabilities of human nature, and feel myself impelled to more active exertions."

"Oh, Monsieur de Fénélon!" exclaimed Lionel, "how ashamed I feel of my childish petulance, which would not allow me to see things in their true light ! You are again in the right. Now, for the first time, the court seems to burst upon me in all its dazzling brilliancy ! Oh, if thus you think of it, why do you forsake it ?"

"Upon the very same principle on which I admire it," answered Fénélon. "I too wish to be of some use, and the same sphere is not allotted to all. If the king, in the perfect fulfilment of his vocation, even to the externals of this splendid court, fills me with admiration, I, who am destined both by inclination and education for the church, can only imitate him by quitting a stage upon which none of those qualities, the perfection of which is my earnest object of desire, could be matured."

"You may be right," said Lionel ; "and this call is of more importance than the feeling of regret with which the thought of soon seeing you here no more occasions to me. I wished to have pursued you with my friendship !"

Fénélon bowed with a look of kindness to Lionel, and then asked him if he had spoken that evening to Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières.

"The young lady appears to me in an unapproachable position," replied Lionel ; "and perhaps my ill-humour was partly occasioned by finding myself separated from her by her inflexible performance of her official duties. She who is so lively,

so noble and intellectual, stands there, behind the queen's chair, as cold and motionless as if she were a mere appendage to the throne."

"It is very likely that at this moment she does indeed look upon herself as little else, for she has always an accurate perception of what ought to be done, and sets herself about it with earnestness."

"She is a very extraordinary girl!" exclaimed Lionel, involuntarily. "One feels *that* the moment one makes her acquaintance."

Fénélon looked at Lionel with a strange expression; there was an ardour in it which told of a deep feeling, and a melancholy which expressed its sacrifice. After a short pause, he said, "She is the most complete model of female perfection that I know, and her freedom of manner springs from her confidence in herself. A singular combination has brought about this result. The mother is not unfrequently rude in her expressions, but she is high-minded, a sincere, good woman, and her pride, which is often displayed in great arrogance, shews itself quite as often in her contempt for all littlenesses and meannesses. The father is entirely occupied in externals; but he has refined manners, and understood well how to conduct his daughter's education. Her fine nature partook only of what was best in both; she never met with opposition, and was under no rule but her own, which, however, always gave satisfaction to her parents: extraordinary as she is, she resembles them both."

Lionel listened eagerly, his looks were fixed upon the beautiful form, which continued in the same immoveable position, whilst Fénélon's words

were disclosing to him the treasures of her mind, which gave to the apparently cold statue the charm of a warm and generous soul.

“She is your pupil, is she not, M. de Fénélon?” asked Lionel.

“Yes, if you choose to call her so,” replied he; “but what can one teach her? Latterly, indeed, our relative positions appear to me to be reversed!”

The eyes of both young men were still unconsciously upon her, when suddenly they perceived that she relaxed from her cold upright posture, and with much agitation stooped down to the queen, who turned half round to her lady in waiting. She held something towards her in haste, which the queen seemed to inhale for a moment, and then turned round again; but so pale had she become, that even her lips were colourless.

“The queen is unwell,” said Lionel. “The heat and the length of the ceremony have been too much for her.”

Fénélon was silent; but his eyes were directed towards the middle of the saloon, where some object seemed to attract the notice of all: behind the duchesses, the last in the line, a very beautiful young woman was seen approaching. Nature seemed to have lavished upon her person every charm, and she looked as if she were ashamed of being so favoured. Both in face and in figure her beauty was of so refined and regular a character, that all others were eclipsed by the comparison. Her skin vied with the whiteness of her dress, and her deep blue eyes were a well of unfathomable

love. And yet, with all these advantages, how little was she elated by them ! Slowly as the train of duchesses moved onwards, she seemed with difficulty to follow them. She scarcely ventured to raise her eyes from the ground, and it was evident to all that her limbs trembled. But when she came up to the queen, and bowed the knee in homage before her, she would have fallen, had not M. de Dreux, the master of the ceremonies, at a sign from the queen, stepped forward to support her. Then she raised her beautiful eyes to the queen, (who, visibly affected, bowed graciously,) and two great shining tears rolled down her cheeks. Thereupon she pressed both hands with the most touching and fervent expression of reverence to her breast, and then vanished like a meteor behind the other duchesses, who were already in possession of their *tabourets*. All present, and Lionel amongst the number, were fascinated by her apparition; and not till she had nearly concealed herself in the crowd, did he find words for utterance.

“Who is that beautiful creature ? I never saw her before.”

“But you have heard of her,” replied Fénélon, low, but earnestly; “it is the unfortunate Madame de Lavallière, who appears for the first time as duchess here to-day.”

“Ah ! I understand now. Everything must be possible to that enchantress ! There is beauty of mind and of soul; the beautiful exterior is not all.”

“It is so indeed,” said Fénélon; “and lamentable as her condition is, there is still a redeeming side,

which can only exist in a noble mind, created for virtue, and still clinging to it even in error."

"Almost all speak thus of this charming woman," said Lionel, "and herein is found some slight excuse for the king."

"That is true," said Fénélon; "but in every case there is a course more noble than that of yielding to passion; namely, that of subduing it, or at least of suppressing its manifestation."

At that instant the queen called the Duchess of Bellefonds, who, with her white wand in her hand, kept guard at the foot of the throne. As soon as she received her commands, she stalked with merciless solemnity through the room up to the Duchess de Lavallière, who, ready to faint, was leaning against a column. "Madame la Duchesse de Lavallière, her Majesty invites you to make use of the *tabouret* which belongs to you: lay your hand upon my arm; I will lead you."

All made way, and the unhappy duchess silently followed the mistress of the robes; and after deeply curtseying to the queen, she sat down upon the *tabouret*, the object of envy and ambition to so many, which at least saved her from a fainting fit.

The king, from the first entrance of Madame de Lavallière, had never lost sight of her, though he continued to talk to the various persons who approached him, without appearing to take any notice of what passed. The courtiers, too, adroitly contrived so to place themselves as to allow the king a full view of the object of his attachment. He saw the struggle of the queen, and her change of colour, and how nearly Madame de Lavallière had been

overcome; and he trembled for both, for at that moment he loved them both, and with almost equal ardour, since it was for his sake that both were suffering. This time, however, his affection for the queen prevailed. For when she sent the Duchess of Bellefonds to conduct his fainting mistress to a place, her claim to which she dared not assert, he laid his heart at her feet, and shewed his gratitude by every means in his power, becoming, for this one evening at least, a tender and devoted cavalier to her. His anxious enquiries as to how she bore the fatiguing exertions of the court instantly animated her languid eyes with the hope of having given him satisfaction; and this pure and unselfish being, who never exacted anything, was made completely happy, and thought without rancour, almost indeed with affection, of her meek rival.

The king remained by her side, having, as it appeared, eyes for no one else, until she went to the card-table; and, when disengaged, he found that the Duchess de Lavallière had departed.

“I hate you both!” ejaculated Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières, as she endeavoured to pass by Fénelon and Lionel.

“Stop, stop!” cried Lionel. “You are not to throw down the gauntlet in that manner, and then run away. What have we done to deserve those words, which you must recall at all costs?”

“Do you think that I have not observed you,” said she, “and seen how you have been going the way of all the world? Could you find nothing else to look at but this new duchess, that you stared at her like children at a puppet? Oh! what

a state of things, when no one ventures to call such conduct by its right name ! when all can forgive *him*, and persuade *him* that because *he* does it, it is permissible ! Only go on,—the example will not be lost ! Already all who praise, and admire, and palliate what he does, have the inclination to imitate him. How I despise them all ! And both of you, detected in the same course, I hate you, and that is why I hate you.”

“ And that is exactly where you are in the wrong,” replied Lionel, “ for *you* have been the chief topic of our conversation this evening; that unfortunate woman and her humiliating appearance afforded only a short episode of compassion in our conference.”

“ And who gave you leave to talk about me ?” she answered, and looked at them both with a more gentle expression.

“ That, at least, you have no power to prevent, when you are there, and we have the advantage of knowing you. Do you think, that those who have once seen you, can repress all thought of you ?”

She looked at him, and, as if laying aside her mask, said, not in her former high and bantering tone, “ Count, I know what designs are made for us; let us deal candidly with each other.”

And so saying, she vanished in the crowd. Fénelon had also disappeared from Lionel’s side. He stood fixed in deep thought. Did he guess what she—what the queen meant ? Or did he indeed not comprehend it ?

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## CHAPTER II.

THE Duc de Lesdiguières had just opened his palace, which was newly fitted up ; and it was universally agreed that there, and at the Maréchale de Crécy's, not only the best society was to be found, but also the most spacious and magnificently furnished apartments. Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières appeared every day in her mother's drawingroom, during the time which Maria Theresa spent with her mother-in-law ; with that exception she never left the queen.

Lionel paid a visit at the Hôtel de Lesdiguières every day at the same hour with the Marquis de Souvré. He would have been astonished had he been told how he was thereby confirming the reports which were already circulated of his intended marriage with Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières. Thinking of the present moment only, he fully assented to the artful assertion of Souvré, who, appearing constantly in a state of *ennui*, declared to him, that, without the presence of Mademoiselle Victorine, life was insupportable. With deep design he would draw Lionel away from others to Victorine, and, as soon as he had led them both into conversation, he would leave them, which made their approximation more striking ; for when brought into contact, they were both too well

pleased with each other's conversation, to break it off voluntarily, and they did not remark one circumstance which shewed the light in which their intercourse was regarded, viz. that nobody disturbed them, which proved that they were considered as affianced.

Lionel found himself daily more occupied by Victorine. She flattered his weaknesses by her peculiarities; for she was all that he was not. He felt himself constantly supported and understood, and his deficiencies supplied, by her firm and noble character and her quick uncompromising judgment. On the other hand, this noble creature fell into the fault so frequent with her sex—seeing the weaknesses of the man, and still, with a sense of her own power, indulging herself in the hope of being able to work a change and impart the strength required. But she did not perceive that her fancy was by degrees converting him into what she wished him to be; she did not discover his deficiencies in certain qualities, which indeed had never been wanting in their conversations, because she herself had exhibited them, while Lionel possessed only the ready and agreeable faculty of instantly comprehending and following the impulse which she gave. He had the mildness and softness which were wanting in her, and which she wished to acquire, though thwarted in the attempt by the vigour of her own resolute nature. On this account she thought him so much better than herself. She mistook that for superiority, which was, in fact, merely a species of indolence ennobled by a feeling heart, which in earlier days might perhaps have

been fortified into greater firmness of character; but which at this time, as we have already shewn, was moulded, at the will of his mother, to the furtherance of her own selfish ends.

However, nothing as yet aroused Lionel from the lulling effects of this course of daily social distraction, which absorbed him proportionately to the increase of petty interests to be pursued, in which those who do not at once reject them soon become inextricably entangled.

His father confidently expected that Anne of Austria would choose a bride for his son, and felt a little malicious pleasure in having, as he imagined, taken this affair out of his wife's hands. Moreover, the king and queen treated Lionel with marked kindness. He was so often told that he was sure of a high place about the court, that he at last began to consider his honour implicated in the fulfilment of this general expectation; and from hence sprung up ambition and vanity, which chained him to the spot where he looked for honour and distinctions.

The friendship, the preference—for he would not call it anything less—with which Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières had honoured him, could not but be of great assistance to his views, on account of the high favour she enjoyed with their majesties. When in the presence of these high personages, he was, unintentionally but obviously, engrossed by her; and it always appeared to him that the queen observed him with kindness on those occasions, and afterwards invited him to her more private parties, where Lionel, animated by his secret wishes, was

more agreeable than his habitual indolence usually permitted. His feelings and actions were much what those of most young men would be, who, without any plan of life or strength of character, were thrown into the intoxicating atmosphere of such a theatre.

Whilst we reflect, however, how his present conduct was fulfilling the views of the maréchale, and gratifying the secret hatred of the Marquis de Souvré, we must also do justice to Lionel, by acknowledging the temptations which they contrived to multiply around him. They looked on quietly whilst he entangled himself, cautiously concealing from him the true drift of his proceedings, until no option should be left him but to accomplish their schemes; and the moment when he must fly to them for succour, was a matter of precise calculation.

This was the course followed by the Maréchale de Crécy, whilst at the same time she persuaded herself that she was performing her maternal duty to a son who was of too easy a disposition to steer his own course through life. His youthful obstinacy with regard to the daughter of an English parson she had long ago forgiven, because she considered that affair at an end; not, indeed, from any confidence in his willing acquiescence, but from the hope that his present conduct would render it impossible for him to retrace his steps.

The winter passed away, the spring was far advanced, and Lionel did not return to St. Roche. The court was gayer and more brilliant than ever; the king, animated by fresh projects of war, at-

tracted to the court of France all the talent of the kingdom, contending for the honour of his service.

Louis knew, as did all the friends of the Maréchal de Crécy, that Lionel was not to enter the ranks of the army; but the campaign which was now preparing was one of the highest pretensions, and was announced with presumptuous certainty of success; and while the preparations were conducted with the most experienced skill, the camp exhibited all the attractions of a brilliant court. To accompany the army was the ambition of the whole nobility. As it was impossible to satisfy all the aspirants to this honour, and the selection was necessarily limited, numerous intrigues were set on foot in order to obtain it.

Lionel was now so frequently admitted into the queen's private circle, that he could no longer feel a doubt of receiving some appointment in her suite; but he accepted the congratulations offered him in a manner which left it uncertain whether his wishes had been gratified or not. But no appointment had yet been made. He appeared every evening with the same hope, and returned with the same disappointment. This wounded his vanity in a painful degree, and he often said to himself that he must first secure this point, which concerned his honour, and then he would immediately set out on his long-delayed visit to St. Roche. Then again, Lionel sometimes heard things said which made him think that the king had other and higher views for him. This strange withholding of an appointment, which so many with less preten-

sions had attained, was the more incomprehensible, from the kindness their majesties evinced towards him, and which seemed to confirm his claims.

Madame Henriette, hearing the young Count de Crécy one evening engaged in an animated conversation upon the good fortune of being in the army, smiled, and said, "Have not our measures produced any effect yet? Does not the old gentleman yet become impatient?"

Lionel's reply was that sort of conventional smile which persons of distinction are sure of receiving when they are not understood by those whom they address. He was thinking how to frame an inquiry, when Madame turned away: at the same time tapping him with her fan, she said, "Patience! patience! You are too good a son to lose it so soon."

The young count looked at her in amazement; and the Marquis de Souvré, who had sent the Count de Guiche to interrupt the good-natured princess's conversation with him, smiled at Lionel's look of astonishment, the key to which he possessed. By means of his friendship with Guiche, (whose passion for Madame Henriette cost him his life,) Souvré had become the confidant of the unfortunate princess, and had obtained an influence over her, which rendered it easy for him to make her co-operate in his plans. Madame accordingly assured the king that Lionel and the maréchale still hoped to obtain his father's consent to the young count's entering the army; and that, if the king would only delay giving him an appointment

about the court, the old man would at last have no resource left, but to offer him to his majesty as a soldier. The king pitied the youth, who, in submission to the will of his father, gave up the profession he desired, and complied with the request of the princess ; and so Lionel experienced all the disappointments which were so well calculated to excite irritation, and to give to the careless child of fortune, feelings of dependence, of opposition, and of failure, from which his life had hitherto been free.

In this mood of restless expectation, he passed the hours in his own room, until he could go to his mother; who, by the constant presence of the happy and innocent Louise, avoided every opportunity of speaking with him alone. One day, however, he was disturbed in his solitary and dejected musings: his valet entered, followed by a man, who rushed up to him, and whom he recognised as Lesueur reduced to a skeleton.

“ Lesueur !” exclaimed Lionel, the blood rushing to his face, which betrayed a stronger emotion than surprise. “ Whence come you ?” asked he distractedly, and without perceiving the awkwardness of the question.

“ Whence I come, sir ?” replied Lesueur. “ Surely, I cannot suppose that you do not recollect, since you sent me there yourself !”

“ You do, then, indeed, come from St. Roche ?” eagerly exclaimed Lionel, who had now recovered himself. “ Oh, then, you have much, much to tell me ! But first rest yourself, and let us have some breakfast. I will send my excuses

to my mother, and we will have a few hours together."

All was soon arranged according to his wishes, and Lionel had time to collect himself, and Lesueur to overcome his suspicious sensitiveness; during which Lionel observed the extraordinary change in the artist, evidently on the brink of the grave.

"Is not my St. Roche really beautiful?" said Lionel, drawing forth, at last, the tardy communication of Lesueur. "It was not a bad idea, was it, to banish you there?"

"An idea for which, God knows, my life will be too short to thank you! Yes, Lesueur, the dying Lesueur, ventures to assert, that his last picture is his best. I have painted your wife twice, count,"—he spoke in a low voice, and trembling from emotion,—"for I was unable, in one picture, to take in such abundant loveliness. A hundred pictures I could have wished to paint there—all of herself—each displaying some new view of this beautiful, divine creature!"

"Lesueur," exclaimed Lionel, with a careless smile, "don't make me jealous! I think you are in love—your heart has followed your hand!"

Lesueur's large dying eyes cast a glance beneath which Lionel's fell to the ground. "Ah!" ejaculated he, "woe to the artist who is not thus affected! Woe to him who misconstrues this holy feeling, and debases it by the alloy of worldly thoughts! Ah, count!" continued he, with vehemence, "do not you still know how the pure atmosphere which surrounds your wife raises us above the foolish desires of this earth? how it

purifies us from the vices acquired by contact with the world? how we forget, in her presence, all we have done and wished, and even considered as right or allowable before? and how we enter upon a new life, to become worthy of that pure world of innocence which she reveals to us?"

Lionel knew it no longer, or the knowledge lay repressed and dormant within him. He sank back in his chair like one condemned, whilst Lesueur continued, with increased emotion:—"I was ill—dying;—from her picture I was hurried to a sick-bed! There did she nurse and tend me. Hear me, sir! not only to this miserable, decayed, mortal body did she minister—she healed my soul, which was more diseased than my body. And if now I find the way to that world beyond the grave—if rest and peace attend my deathbed—there will I bless her who combated all my errors, until they lay vanquished at her feet. I shall see her till my eyes are closed in death, with the saint-like expression of her countenance, praying by my bed-side, when she thought I was dying. That prayer will be on my lips at my last hour—the plank to bear me to eternity. And this she did," continued he, almost in tears, whilst Lionel covered his face in deep emotion, "when her own situation required a care and attention which no woman in her state denies herself."

"What do you mean, Lesueur?" exclaimed Lionel, as he started up from his chair pale as death, and seized hold of him with wild agitation. "What ails Flora? Why does she require care? What has happened to her?"

“ What ! ” replied Lesueur, “ can *you* put such questions to me ? Do you not know what is the matter with Flora ? Oh, fly to her ! fly to her with all speed ! If she has concealed it from you, it is to surprise you with the sacred joy which she has in store for you.”

“ Lesueur,” stammered Lionel, “ say—speak out ! Flora ! ” He could not give words to his forebodings.

“ Flora is likely to become a mother ! ” said Lesueur.

At these words Lionel threw himself into the arms of Lesueur, and wept aloud. The icy band which confined his heart had burst—he was a man again, the husband of Flora ! The powerful voice of nature had not called in vain.

“ Now Heaven be praised ! Amy Gray is in the wrong ! ” exclaimed Lesueur ; “ he loves her still ; he will prize, honour, and cherish her as he ought to do ! But hasten to her ! Amy Gray told me that next month her hour of trial must come.”

“ Lesueur, my friend, my benefactor !—Flora, my blessed, innocent wife ! To-morrow, to-morrow will I set off ! ”

Lionel, wild with agitation, summoned his trusty valet, and instantly gave orders for his journey on the following morning. He sent to announce himself to his father, whom he wished to inform of his departure for St. Roche. Then he would go to Madame Henriette, and open his whole heart to her ;—she would befriend him with their majesties ;—then at the queen’s evening party he would take his leave of her and the king. His

mother was not considered in these schemes. How he should act with respect to her he knew not, and discarded the thought. Thinking aloud, and uttering all his thoughts to Lesueur, he paced about his room, and at last gave orders for his toilet, and for his carriage to be got ready to take him to the Countess de Grammont's, the princess's first lady-in-waiting. He then went to his father, and in a hurried and distracted manner, bearing evidence of his late emotion, informed him of his intended journey to St. Roche.

“ Ah, ha ! ” said the old marshal, laughing, “ so we have the blood of the Crécy's ! Hey ! We are vexed, are we ? The place about court, and the bride, are too long in coming. Ha ! Well, my boy, this is not so much amiss. Affect a little anger, to make them remember who you are ! It will create some surprise if you go away now, as if you turned your back upon all court favour. I have nothing to say against it, and you may be easy. I will take your place in the meantime. They have only to ask me where you are gone to —I will give them an answer ! Queen Anne thinks that it is not necessary to keep her word, now that the old marshal is no longer able to storm the gates of Paris, and overthrow the Frondeurs. Well, well, we will let them see who I am ! Go your way, lad, and I 'll warrant that you will soon be called back again.”

The physician and the chaplain interrupted this paternal effusion, and deprived Lionel of the opportunity to reply, if he had intended it, which we are inclined to doubt ; for to bring the marshal round

from his strong prejudices, he must have had the resolution of his mother, in which he was utterly deficient. He was floating in a sea of conflicting thoughts and feelings, without any definite or pre-concerted plan. It was very irksome to him to listen to the tedious jocularity of their conversation; but, as the marshal would have been much offended had he retired without being dismissed, he had nothing for it but to put on an appearance of patience, although inwardly chafing with vexation. At length the moment so impatiently awaited arrived, and he was immediately in his carriage on his way to the Countess de Grammont's.

Madame de Grammont was under the illusion, that, because she filled the post of first lady to a clever princess, she must herself be clever and witty, and by the ease and elegance of her manners she sought to cast ridicule upon the Duchess de Bellefonds, whose stately Spanish dignity denounced the smallest deviation from the rules of etiquette. She was easy of access at all hours, and never sought to preclude the *entrée* to Madame—lived in an atmosphere of perfume, surrounded by birds, dogs, and cats—*au reste*, the most good-natured woman in the world.

She received Lionel very graciously, and went immediately to Madame, to deliver his request. But she soon returned, looking very blank, as she had a decided negative to bring in answer; the princess wished to be alone. Lionel, thus thwarted in the line of conduct which he had thought would be the easiest and best, retreated through the anterooms and galleries, buried in deep and troubled thought,

quite at a loss now how to proceed. For one moment uncertain which way to turn to find his carriage, he entered an open gallery in which were situated the princess's private apartments, and which looked upon the garden; there he heard the opening of a door which led directly to Madame's suite of rooms, whence at the same instant the Marquis de Souvré hastily issued.

“ Souvré ! ”

“ Crécy ! ” each exclaimed in surprise.

“ Then the princess was not alone,” said Lionel, soliloquising aloud. “ It was *me* only that she would not see ? ”

“ You seem to be in a hypochondriacal humour,” said Souvré, laughing. “ But what is the matter with you ? Seriously, you look dreadfully tragical ; I can scarcely recognise the gay and lively companion of Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières ! ”

Enough of that, marquis ! ” said Lionel. “ Only tell me, if you come from the princess, whether there is no possibility of gaining admission to her ? ”

“ What ! after Madame de Grammont got a refusal to your request ! What can you be thinking of ? But, never mind ; what signifies the humour of princesses to us ? Who says that I was with her ? It is of mighty little importance.”

“ It is more important than you imagine, Souvré ! ” replied Lionel. “ I must set out for St. Roche early to-morrow morning. I wish to open my heart to the kind and feeling princess ; she will obtain the king's consent for me, and then my parents will make no resistance.”

“ Now heaven be praised that you have been hindered in the execution of this foolish undertaking ! What do you suppose the consequences would have been ? Her serious displeasure, the king’s unmeasured wrath, and probably the adoption of measures which would have made it difficult for you to get to St. Roche at all !”

“ No, no, Souvré ! no ; you are wrong. The king would not act in that manner ; at least not towards one who bears my name.”

“ For that very reason,” rejoined Souvré, enraged at the foolish pride which made him so sanguine and over-confident ; “ precisely on that account will you draw upon yourself his heavy displeasure. Are not the Crécy-Chabannes cousins to the king ? Their alliances are, therefore, as he assumes, dependent upon his pleasure. Were you not here when the engagement between Count Harcourt and Mademoiselle de Roux was broken off at his command, because a D’Harcourt can only marry with his consent and according to his selection ?”

“ But I—I am already married,” said Lionel. “ There can be no question of breaking off in this case.”

Souvré advanced a few steps, and standing close in front of Lionel, inquired, in a tone of the most insulting mockery, “ Is it possible that you have lived here so long to no purpose ? That you—you can speak of that marriage as a reality ? That you can think that any one, high or low, will consider it as valid and binding ? Inquire, if you can, from your priests, your relations, the minister, the army, the king—and if you will stay to hear the answer,

you will find it all one and the same. No one will regard you as married. No one will esteem it possible for a Crécy-Chabanne, a cousin of the king, a Roman Catholic, moreover, to wed the daughter of an English parson, and a heretic. A ceremony performed according to the English Church, the parties being minors too, without the consent of the parents or of the sovereign, must be so obviously to all eyes a work of intrigue, that no one could consider it as binding by any law, civil or divine. I therefore advise you as a friend, do not enter the lists on account of this trivial youthful folly; you will be assailed by the most intolerable of weapons, ridicule!"

Lionel listened to this irritating speech with a feeling of such dejection, that it had no power to mortify him further. He had not lived so long at the court unscathed; which Souvré knew better than himself. What had been now so unmercifully spoken out to him, he had long been given to understand by many hints and inuendos, and was not therefore surprised by it; but, as usual, he found no aid from his own counsel.

"I must go to St. Roche, nevertheless," said he, at last rousing himself from his reverie; "that is a sacred duty, be it misrepresented as it may."

"Do so," said Souvré, carelessly; "only be silent as to the cause! I must speak with Madame de Bellefonds this morning, and I will request her to inform their majesties of your intended journey. Why should not you have your Hôtel Biron, as well as the king?"

This was too much. It aroused all Lionel's better

feelings, and he turned to make an angry reply; but Souvré had glided down the great staircase, and left him with a feeling of pain and humiliation as great as that enemy of his peace could have desired. Confused and stupified, he pursued the course which he had chosen. The frame of mind in which he found himself was not worthy of Flora; but it was mixed with some nobler feelings. That which prompted his immediate return to her still continued to predominate, and overbalance the other impressions which had gained but too much weight over him. His mother could not see him when he would have visited her. He remarked that she received all her morning visitors that day, and she sent to inform Lionel that there would be a great dinner. Even before he had been with his father, she knew all that had passed in his room, and had held a short conference with the Marquis de Souvré, in consequence of which the train was fired which had been long laid in readiness for the occasion.

Souvré, who, through her fatal attachment, always gained admission to the unfortunate Henrietta, went an hour earlier than usual, and informed her that Lionel was now compelled to give up all hopes of entering the army, as the marshal continued firm in his determination against it; that he despaired of the king's giving him any place about the court, and felt himself slighted and overlooked. The maréchale wished him to express to the princess her grief upon the subject, and to entreat her aid and influence with the king. The princess, with her accustomed good-nature, pro-

mised that she would arrange it all that evening at the queen's party.

The maréchale did not make her appearance until her rooms were full of company, and there was no further opportunity for any private conversation. When she encountered her son, she stood still, and said to him abruptly, in the presence of twenty or more witnesses, "You are going to leave us to-morrow, I hear. You are very impatient to take a look at your beautiful estate at St. Roche ! However, we must applaud your eagerness: many of your ancestors used to go and sojourn there from time to time; your parents never felt the inclination, so perhaps in this point you will more resemble your forefathers. We shall meet this evening at the queen's party."

And so saying, she turned to address others. Lionel's feelings of anger and resentment were for the first time aroused, and the pangs of his heart were betrayed in his pallid features.

At the queen's unusually numerous party in the evening, the gentle Henrietta of England noticed his pale and dejected look, and tried with an encouraging smile to raise his spirits; for she hoped that through her means he would that evening attain that for which he so evidently pined. After the arrival of the king, who soon took his place next his beautiful sister-in-law, Lionel found it possible to approach Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières, who from a distance had observed him with a strong feeling of interest. He felt, as usual, more at his ease by her side; she appeared to him that day to be the only sympathising individual in the

circle, and he thought he could disclose to her all the sorrows and troubles of his mind. Yielding to the impulse of the moment, as men are so apt to do, without considering how their expressions may be misinterpreted, he told her that he was to take his departure the next morning;—how full his heart was, at the probability that he should never return;—how all his hopes and all his wishes in that place had been disappointed;—that he should now return to the solitude of St. Roche;—that he felt little regret at leaving anybody there, the separation from her was the one thing that grieved him; he wished to have opened his whole heart to her, but feared that she would then banish him from her presence for ever, and he would thus have destroyed the only attraction which could bring him back,—the hope of still finding her his friend.

He said all this in a tone of voice which expressed the deepest motion, whilst he looked at her with the admiration which her uncommon beauty always awakened in him, and which was now more than usually striking from the expression of her countenance and her changing colour. Victorine, from his words, his looks, his whole manner, felt fully convinced, and was justified in the persuasion, that he loved her, and that she was the cause of his despair and of his departure. Had Lionel studied how he should best convince her of his attachment, and by degrees gain her affections, he could not have done it more effectually than by the whole of his conduct for months past. Nevertheless, he was unconscious of any impropriety; he had never openly declared himself her suitor, and

had, indeed, no such intention. He had sought the pleasure of the moment in her conversation, and his vanity had led him to seek her favour, without inquiring whether the means he used to obtain it might not fill the unguarded and unsuspecting heart of a girl with hopes which would be equivalent to an open demonstration of love. He would have repelled with astonishment any such accusation ; and yet, under any other circumstances, he would have been aware, that, had such been his object, he could not have done more. But, besides this, a fact which was unknown to Lionel, though long before their acquaintance Victorine's loquacious mother had revealed it to her, a future matrimonial alliance had been concluded, with the approbation of their majesties, between the maréchale and the house of Lesdiguières. Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières was certainly from her rank and wealth the greatest *parti* at court ; the maréchale could not have made a more judicious choice, and the personal attractions of the young lady seemed likely to ensure her an easy conquest.

But the idea of compulsion was very distasteful to Victorine, and she determined to be repulsive and harsh in her manner towards Lionel, in the view of obliging her parents to abandon their premature plans. Her attempts at this we have related ; and how by degrees she became the victim of that womanly, and not uncommon illusion, that she might influence Lionel's character, which appeared to her still unformed. Now she loved him ; and the question was no longer what, by her means, he might become, but whether, such as he

was, he could and would be hers. But, notwithstanding this growing attachment, she had strength of character to remain faithful to another purpose which she had conceived ; this was, never to abandon the queen her mistress, whom she adored, and who tenderly loved her in return, and treated her as a friend and confidante, for she was conscious that she was sometimes able to prevent or to mitigate the many miseries and discords which unhappily existed between the royal couple. She had, therefore, in her plain straightforward manner, declared to the queen, as well as to the king, that she would consent to become Lionel's wife, only upon the condition of his also having some appointment which should attach him to the person of the queen, whom she never would quit.

Their majesties had both had frequent opportunities of proving the worth of this noble creature : they were, therefore, thankful for so generous a sacrifice, and had long destined for Lionel a place about the queen, which had only been withheld from him through the plots of his mother and the Marquis de Souvré.

Victorine could not doubt that Lionel had been informed of her refusal to become his under any circumstances but those just mentioned ; she felt that he might regard this as a want of affection, and that this was the cause of his appearing in the disturbed state in which she saw him. The wish to acknowledge frankly her real feelings rose uppermost in her heart, and she now listened to his words, hoping that they would afford her the opportunity, with that emotion which so enhanced her beauty.

Every word he spoke seemed to give her the opening she required, but before she could sufficiently master her pride and her embarrassment, their majesties rose and moved into another room, where a concert was performed by Lully's famous orchestra, led by himself.

Now came the important moment when the king, passing by Lionel, stopped, and nodding to him, said good-naturedly, "So, Count de Crécy, you wish to go and look after your estates at St. Roche?"

Lionel bowed low, as he replied in the affirmative.

"Don't stay away too long; the queen wishes to give you an office in her household. I have this day appointed you her equerry, and shall be glad if this should conduce to the accomplishment of your other wishes. Madam!" said he, turning to the queen, "are you satisfied?"

The queen bowed to the king, who, with a gracious smile, passed on, whilst the queen lingered behind a few moments to say some kind words to Lionel, and to receive his thanks.

Scarcely had their majesties left the room, when the whole court crowded round Lionel to offer him their congratulations, which appeared so cordial and hearty, that those unacquainted with that society might have supposed him surrounded by tender and affectionate friends.

To Madame de Crécy, also, were addressed the most flattering expressions of congratulation, which, however, she received with great coldness and ill-humour. To the king and queen alone she was

overflowing with dutiful homage. A great check had been given to her plans, which was the more alarming from its being inexplicable to her from what quarter this disturbance had arisen. The sudden and unexpected nomination of Lionel by the king, was intended to make his journey to St. Roche impossible; and now, the king had alluded to this journey as admitted and allowed, and it was therefore not to be prevented.

The maréchale could not unravel the thread of the mystery, for the kind and feeling Countess de Grammont had been the cause of it. When Lionel had received the answer of the princess denying him admittance, in the confusion of his mind he had expressed to her such an anxious and impatient desire to go to St. Roche, that the good lady was moved by it; and, anxious at least to do him this service, after having failed in procuring him an audience, she beset the princess with entreaties to intercede with the king to grant the poor young man his wish. Henrietta, with her habitual good-nature, had done so, and the king had consented.

It would be impossible to describe Lionel's state of agitation! The thought of Flora, so lately stirred up in his heart, tended, indeed, to lessen in some degree the triumph of that evening; but he had struck root too deeply in the soil of the court, not to feel with delight the gratified cravings of ambition; and every one could read in his brightened countenance the fulfilment of his wish.

Victorine also, who was fixed during the whole of the concert behind the queen's chair, saw with

a beating heart this change of expression: their looks met, and the amiable girl, thinking that the time for reserve was so nearly at an end, let him read her whole heart in her eyes.

The king and queen now arose, followed by their attendants, and, saluting the company as they passed, retired to their private apartments. Lionel, during this slow progress, placed himself purposely in Victorine's way. She must wish him joy; his joyful looks demanded her congratulations. She believed she understood him.

"Lionel," said she, tremulously, with blushes and downcast eyes, "I know the desire of our families—I understand your's; and my heart resists this desire no longer, as it will not interfere with my first vow to the queen. She is aware of our wishes, and approves them. So away to St. Roche! *I will be no bar to your return!*"

In haste she followed the royal train. That was fortunate. Her words had petrified Lionel:—she saw it not.

"Will you give me your arm, my dear Lionel?" said the maréchale at that moment. "I suppose you will not set out until you have announced your very honourable and flattering appointment to your father?"

"Certainly not," replied Lionel; and, after conducting his mother to her carriage, he got into his own, hastened to his room, and dismissing his servants, remained alone—the most unhappy man on earth, as he imagined.

## CHAPTER III.

THE woods of St. Roche, the gardens which surrounded the castle, the adjacent meadows and pasture-land, all were clad in the fresh and lovely verdure of the month of June, and shone forth in the richest and most luxuriant beauty. Flowers of every hue daily bloomed in the greatest profusion, and seemed to greet each other with gladness in their green abodes; whilst from the blue sky and shady groves resounded a melodious concert from thousands of little throats. The sun's warm glow enlivened the long days, and dewy nights refreshed and renewed the fragrant loveliness of nature. Listening to, and observing all these beauties with the eager attention of a child, happy in the enjoyment, but almost fearful lest by a look or a movement the work of nature should be disturbed, Flora glided along through this summer pageant, herself the fairest of all the blooming flowers around. She was unhappy at Lionel's prolonged absence; but, amidst all the glories that surrounded her, she could not long find room for grief. The tears she wept were like the summer nights; they were of short duration, for, with the return of the sun, sweet and cheerful thoughts came again. Amy Gray had at length been obliged to inform her of her situation, which seemed to kindle a new flame

of devotion within her. Long did she remain upon her knees after receiving Amy's communication, in silent prayer that she might become more holy and more worthy of this closer bond of union with her God, as she esteemed it. And often would she sit for hours under the trees, and amongst the flowers, in pious contemplation of the new work to which He had called her.

Lesueur had occasioned her some pain; he was under the impression that God had forsaken him, which filled him with terror; but she soon adapted herself to his case, becoming more communicative and confidential, in the hope that she might gain an influence over him, and convert him. How she succeeded in this work, is already known; and her success caused her the greatest joy, which she often expressed to Amy. But it was in vain that Amy Gray saw continually before her this pure and affecting example of devotion to God, and of that serene joy, which, flowing from it, overcomes all worldly tribulation. Her ungovernable feelings were only more exasperated by the piety and excellence which augmented those claims the world so ungratefully neglected; and she was overwhelmed with grief and mortification.

Had Flora been aware of her companion's state of mind, she would undoubtedly have combated it; but Amy concealed her inward thoughts in silence. She was not capable of imitating her idol in anything. Flora inspired her with a feeling bordering upon awe; and, while she esteemed nothing good enough for her, she did not except herself, and felt displeased that such an angel

should be restricted to the society of one so inferior.

Lesueur's arrival filled her at first with scorn and suspicion. He only came, she thought, that the count might stay away. He was to act the part of companion, for which the latter considered himself too good. She had, moreover, a very mean idea of painters, who seemed to her utterly useless and out of place there ; and that this sick, pale, melancholy man should associate with her angel, appeared to her a perfect insult.

Flora, on the contrary, was delighted at length to see a painter, for she had the highest respect for their calling, and wished to behold a man who felt himself inspired to imitate the works of God.

When Lesueur entered, Flora made him so deep a curtsey that the proud painter blushed, and bowed still lower to the wondrous beauty before him.

“ You are welcome here,” said she softly, like a bashful child. “ We esteem it an honour to receive one inspired by God to imitate his works, while *we* can only behold and admire them ! It must be a great privilege to do so,” continued she, approaching the astonished Lesueur with timid curiosity ; whilst he, embarrassed by so singular an address, knew not whether to regard the lovely creature before him as a child, a woman, or an angel.

Flora's wish of beholding a painter had now been gratified, and she was much surprised to find him so like other people. She would have been less so, had he worn a purple mantle, and a crown

of bays, than to see him as he now stood before her, sick and weary, with pale cheeks and emaciated form, and attired like other men, with nothing striking about him except his eyes, whose language she afterwards learned to interpret, and which even now seemed to speak intelligibly to her.

“ Ah ! dear sir, you are ill,” said she, in her gentlest tone. “ What can we do for you ? Rest here a little till your room is thoroughly warmed. We will have this couch drawn near the fire. Repose yourself upon it.—I can go away, too, if you would rather be alone ;—or, perhaps, some refreshment would do you good ?”

Lesueur was, in fact, not more ill than usual ; but he almost wished to be so, for the sake of exciting her compassion, and dissembled a little, allowing himself to be treated as if he stood in need of assistance. How eagerly did she then, when she thought he was sufficiently refreshed and strengthened, urge him to tell her of all the wonderful things with which, as she supposed, his mind was stored ! What reverence and timidity marked her conduct towards him ! How careful was she that everything should be prepared for him in the most comfortable manner, so happy did she feel in the honour of receiving a painter as her guest ! Lesueur seemed to have dropped into a visionary world, the reality of which he scarcely deemed possible. The dreams and poetic fancies of his early life seemed to be revived and embodied before him. He set to work, and painted assiduously at her portrait, although he felt that the sun

of his life was sinking fast. Daily he said to himself, "So be it! This last period of my life is the crown of all that has gone before. I now perceive that the high and sacred privilege of being a painter was no empty vision of my own heated brain."

But how great was Flora's astonishment that a painter could have turned from God, and become, as she expressed it, a positive heathen; worshiping the many idols which his heart had sought out in the world, and thence "naturally," as she said, "falling into depression and bitterness of spirit. For how should you expect them to remain true to you, when you have forsaken for them Him who alone is truth. For, had you had God before your eyes, Le Brun could only have benefitted you by his splendid works, which you yourself extol so highly. Had you been actuated by a true charity, you would also enjoy peace." With true Protestant zeal she attacked his weak conscience, which, unhappily, lulled into peace by the outward forms and rites of the Roman Catholic priesthood, could bring no healing to his soul. Then she would talk to him of her father; how humbly he walked before God, trusting all things to his Providence, and distrustful only of himself.

During all this time Lesueur was painting his instructress; and scarcely had he finished one sketch, before he began a second. He thought that he could have painted her a hundred times over, always different, yet always the same,—the greatest prodigy of beauty that had ever come before him. Then she would read aloud to him with her angelic

voice from the New Testament, which he had never known, and from which he imbibed feelings of devotion to which he had hitherto been a stranger. Thus they passed their days, in a cheerful and regular routine. But a misgiving of the corruption of the world, which she had never experienced before, entered the mind of Flora, and caused her to reflect deeply; for she wished to reconcile that which she could no longer deny with her ideas of God's world; wherein, she supposed, it was necessary that the evil one should have his place for some good end, however fearful and amazing this might at first seem. Often did she take counsel with Lesueur, who for her sake earnestly sought to regain that innocence and purity of soul he had so long forgotten; and when he heard with what deep thought and quick penetration this mere child, solely by the light of religion, explained the concerns of this world, he wished he could have called her forth to preach aloud to the wanderers in the wilderness of life. Her words seemed to him revelations from the Most High, and had he not feared to incur her censure, he would have listened to her upon his knees. "How noble must her Lionel be in comparison," thought Flora, "surrounded by the evil world, which he endures for the sake of God, and in order to do honour to that holier and fairer world to which he belongs! But I would rather keep out of it," thought she; "and that Lionel should bring his noble mother, and his dear old father, and Louise, here to us. We ought not to seek temptation,—so, why should they stay there,

if it would be better for them to be here ? To those to whom God has given two places upon earth, He allows no hesitation between them, where the one brings them so much nearer to Him than the other. I must not go there of my own free will ; but, if it be Lionel's wish that I should follow him,—*then*, to stay would be contrary to God's commandment, for Lionel is my husband."

Lesueur was surprised at the confidence she felt in her claims to this relationship, for he was firmly convinced that they would be worth nothing in that world with which she so reasonably dreaded to come into contact. He would often, when alone, wring his hands, and exclaim, "Alas ! if Lionel should forsake her, and she should lose his support, it is but too certain that his parents will afford her no assistance."

As was natural, there arose gradually a more frequent intercourse between him and Amy Gray. Each hoped to learn much from the other ; and solicitude on Flora's account gave to their inquiries on both sides a character above that of mere curiosity. Amy Gray soon extracted from Lesueur what her own suspicions had already suggested, and which it was impossible for him to withhold from her direct questions. From that time forth she looked upon the idol of her heart as lost ; and, with a more bitter hatred of the world than ever, she learned to consider herself as Flora's only stay and support. She adopted this persuasion with an energy of character, which combined with no mean abilities, supplied her want of education ; and though her temper was gloomy and do-

mineering, still, sustained by a noble pride, she acted her part with dignity.

“ Let her continue to lull herself to sleep every evening with her cradle-song of hopes,” said she to Lesueur, her dark looks fixed upon him. “ See, how happy she seems ! She has no fears, no apprehensions. She little imagines that one man may belong to two, like that wicked count,—that he is decking her grave here with glittering baubles, and will yet break her heart, to serve his worldly idols : of this she has not an idea ! And who would tell it her ? The hour when her heart will break is in God’s hand ; but He will also heap his heaviest curses on those who break it.”

After the completion of the first portrait Lesueur fell so ill as to be obliged to keep his bed. Flora assisted Amy in nursing him, and ceased not her cares for his soul ; for the gloomy phantasies and despondency produced by malady seemed to have undone all that she had achieved before. The knowledge they interchanged was very different in its value. Suffering caused Lesueur, who was perverted by the world and its selfish pursuits, to be unguarded in his expressions. Wishing to vindicate the state of his soul, which she so seriously reprehended, he described the temptations of the world, and drew a picture of its corruption, which she was unable to comprehend to its full extent. Too late he became aware, by the excess of her grief, of the mischief he had done, and endeavoured the more diligently to give her comfort, by attention to her admonitions. But he was never able to drive from her hitherto tranquil mind the pain-

ful and withering reflections, which the first evidence of evil, concealed under a fair surface, occasions to the mind of youth. Her firm faith alone sustained and comforted her; and she ended by persuading herself that this excess of evil might be only an illusion of short-sighted mortals, and that God, who sees the hearts of men, alone knows whether all who appear to be so are indeed guilty.

“ When I think,” said she, “ how sinful you must have appeared in the eyes of others, I can comfort myself by reflecting that God has vouchsafed you such sincere repentance, that He has still left so much good in you, and has not withdrawn from you the gift of genius, but that He has chastened you by this sorrow. And, no doubt, this is universally the case. We must always recollect that God loves all his creatures equally; that all are his children; and that He, therefore, as their father, knows what are their trials, and what should be their chastisements; and we have only to submit in silence, and to love our brethren, because they are also God’s creatures.”

Lesueur listened with pious wonder to the expression of the enthusiastic feeling which prompted Flora to contest the very existence of evil. He had forgotten the feeling of youth, which struggles against every impression destructive of confidence in others; and when he found her thus leading him back to peace and serenity, he thought that heaven would surely preserve her life, and bless her, in recompence for this pious work.

This will explain the frame of mind in which Lesueur met Lionel after his recovery and the

completion of the two pictures, and the hope, so suddenly conceived, that he would act justly towards her.

After the departure of Lesueur the solitude of St. Roche might have appeared still more striking; but Flora no longer felt lonely in the possession of her secret joy. She required no society. She was always happy with the vicar and his sister, and with Amy Gray,—but still happier by herself; and even Lionel now scarcely occupied the first place in her thoughts.

When Amy warned her that the time drew near for the fulfilment of her hopes, the solemn thought made her turn pale, and she wished that Lionel might not return until she could place the promised blessing in his arms. This was not Amy's wish. She still awaited in hope the result of Lesueur's communication, and trusted that the blessing of paternal joy would be hallowed to Lionel by previous anxiety for his wife in her hour of peril. One morning, she missed Flora in her usual walk in the valley; and finding her unwell, she instantly sent off a messenger to the experienced doctor who resided in the little village of St. Roche, desiring him to come and take up his abode at the castle. In the meantime, as a faithful and attentive nurse, she took her place by Flora's side, who, after a short and uneasy sleep, awoke, and fixed her eyes upon her companion. She had been dreaming, and clasping her hands together, with an expression of joy, she said, "Oh, Amy! Lionel must come soon; I feel jealous of enjoying this happiness alone!"

“Yes, yes,” said Amy, deeply affected; “he ought soon to be here—the father should be the first to welcome his child!” and, so saying, she hurried away, fearing she might be unable to restrain her feelings of indignation.

That evening the sound of a distant horn was heard—a travelling-carriage dashed along the valley at a rapid pace. Flora heard it, and sank down upon her knees in prayer. Amy’s heart seemed ready to burst.

“Is she alive? Where—oh, where is she, Amy, dear Amy?” inquired Lionel; and he wept like a child, as he clasped the sorrowing but unrelenting woman to his breast.

“Her time is at hand, sir,” said Amy; and the coldness and bitterness of her heart were melted, for she saw that there was no deception in the intensity of his feelings.

He checked his impetuosity, and followed Amy to Flora’s apartment. She had attempted to go to meet him, but her strength failed her. She sat down—a heavenly glow lighted up her angelic countenance.

When he beheld her, his heart was calmed—its impetuous passions were allayed; and he fell in tears at her feet, hiding his face in the folds of her gown.

“I am so glad you are come! You know the event that I am expecting?” said she, in a soft voice. No reproach, no complaint did she utter, but received him with cheerfulness and tenderness, as if they had parted but yesterday. But her joy was soon interrupted by warnings of her approach-

ing sufferings, and Amy led her from the arms of Lionel into her bed-chamber.

The first rays of a July morning's sun had just tinged the horizon, when Lionel knelt by the bed-side of Flora, who, after a night of suffering, had beheld the fulfilment of her hopes and dreams ; and he repeatedly exclaimed, " Flora—Flora, my darling wife, you have given me a son ! "

Flora smiled, and gently whispered, " How tiny he is ! and how his little eyes glisten like stars ! " and great tears rolled down her pale cheeks, which her feeble hands were unable to wipe away.

Amy's evil suspicions were dispelled at the sight of the joyful father, who was anxiously dividing his tender cares between the bed of Flora and the cradle of his child. Her hopes again revived, and she beheld the happiness of her darling without those dismal forebodings which had heretofore so painfully oppressed her. Yet she had not been mistaken, for he was no longer the same Lionel who had once regarded that spot with a sacred love as the object of his exertions, the destination of his life.

He was still what he was at the court of Louis XIV.,—the creature of the moment. Here, so powerfully influenced by the noblest and sweetest ties,—there, under the dominion of the vainest aspirations ; belonging entirely to neither sphere—too vain and ambitious for the one—too good, too deeply versed in the secret of a better life, taught him by Flora, for the other ; always wavering—dissatisfied with himself—on the sure road to become what the Marquis de Souvré was striving to

make him—an unhappy man, led astray by a mistaken course of life.

At the same moment that he was contemplating his wife, the mother of his child, with a feeling bordering upon devotion, he knew that his betrothal with Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières was declared at court, and his return expected for the solemnisation of the marriage. He knew that he must now fulfil the duties which he had unwillingly entailed upon himself, or else be disgraced in the face of the world, to the good opinion of which he now attached such importance, and be driven for ever from the brilliant society which surrounded the divinity of France—her King. All his ambitious hopes would thus be annihilated ; the name he bore, the proud claims of which he had now begun to appreciate, plunged into hopeless obscurity ; and no hope of peace of mind would cheer his banishment, for the curse of his parents, and the thought of Victorine broken-hearted, would always cleave to him.

On the morning succeeding that on which the king had conferred the appointment, the Maréchale de Crécy anticipated Lionel in the apartment of her husband, which she seldom visited. The marshal was gratified by this mark of attention on the part of his wife, in coming so early to announce his son's nomination, as well as to inform him of his betrothal with Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières ; which a few words spoken by their majesties had established as an undoubted fact, and, in the eyes of the parents, had given to it as high a sanction as the priestly blessing. So when Lionel arrived later,

for the purpose of communicating his appointment to his father, he received congratulations on both accounts ; and the exuberant joy of the old soldier precluded any attempt at explanation on the part of his stunned and bewildered son. He was already half equipped in his marshal's uniform. He said he would go and return his thanks to the king, and then make his bow to the old owl, the duchess—mother-in-law, as he jocosely called Victorine's mother ; “ and if your love should be there, she shall have a kiss, as sure as I am a French marshal ! ”

It would have been as easy to have turned the current of the Seine, as to have diverted the stream of thoughts infused into the marshal by his artful wife. Lionel made several unsuccessful attempts to do so ; but he laughed and joked, and paid no attention to them, being certain he could hear nothing but what was running in his own head ; and at length Lionel tore himself away from his father, almost in a state of distraction.

“ Go, then, my boy, and come back soon. I own I do not quite approve of your going to visit that old nest of St. Roche just now, for to me it seems incompatible with the duty and respect you owe to their majesties and to your bride. But your mother may be trusted in such matters ; and if she gives her consent, and the king himself has alluded to it, I have nothing to say. Moreover, I don't expect that your return will be long delayed. Ay, boy, it must be allowed that you have made a capital match ! The old owl of a mother is a sister of the Duchess de Retz, and the Lesdi-

guières stand almost as high as the Crécy and Soubises."

Lionel could bear it no longer. In the deepest anguish of mind he threw himself into his father's arms. The marshal interpreted his indistinct mutterings into words of leave-taking, embraced him tenderly, and then releasing him, he took his jewelled sword from the hand of his servant, and placed it with delight into its golden scabbard. With faltering steps Lionel proceeded through the rooms and galleries which led to the apartments of his mother. Every one he met drew back, and looked in amazement on the fortunate heir, on whose head so many honours were heaped, fearing that he must be attacked with sudden illness. He saw not the page whom his mother had sent to summon him, but mechanically pushing open the door, he entered her dressing-room, and stood before her just as she had thrown off the heavy velvet robes in which she had returned from the queen's levee, where Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières had been presented to the queen-mother, the princesses, and all that distinguished circle, as the affianced bride of the young Count de Crécy-Chabanne. She came back with a feeling of the proudest self-satisfaction at having attained her object; when, suddenly turning, she saw Lionel, and a shudder, such as she had never experienced before, ran through her whole frame; for it was as if a voice like thunder had proclaimed, "Triumph not too soon! it is he who will be the victim!" But she soon recovered herself. She dismissed her attendants, and by the time she had herself closed the

door of the antechamber, she had entirely regained her self-possession, and said to herself, "No weakness now: this is the long-anticipated moment."

She had need of this self-exhortation; for, as she re-entered the apartment, Lionel met her with a face of deadly paleness, and said, in a low and earnest voice, and with an expression in his eyes which smote her to the heart, "Save me, madam, save me!"

These words he repeated so often, and in so fearful a manner, that she thought he had lost his senses.

"First of all, collect yourself, my son," said she, struggling in vain to command her voice. "You are excited to a degree that makes it impossible for you to take a right view of your position. Calm yourself, and rely upon me; acting in unison, we shall be able to adjust all that so painfully overpowers you."

"No, no, madam," continued Lionel, in the same tone; "it is not possible—I cannot be saved! I must be dishonoured, either here, before the king and before all men, or yonder, before God and myself! It is inevitable; I must be the victim!"

"Let me not hear such language as this!" said the maréchale; "my heart cannot sympathise with unmanly feelings. You are saved the moment that you perceive what are the high and honourable duties which your rank, as one of the first of the king's subjects, imposes upon you. You no longer belong to yourself:—from the moment that you have received the king's commands, no other person has any claim upon you; all else is secon-

dary, and *can* and *must* be made subservient to this highest end. Thus do all think who have the honour to be Frenchmen, subjects of the first king in the world ; and thus do those especially think who are nearest to the crown,—the Crécy-Chabannes, the Rohans, Soubises, Montmorencys, Latour d'Auvergne, and such noble persons. If you have committed some youthful follies, you must be aware that nothing of that kind must appear to throw the smallest shade upon the name you inherit ; and as you now can have but one plain duty, you will easily infer how others are to be dealt with."

Lionel did not answer, but fixed his dark and perplexed looks upon his mother, who continued with more boldness :—

" I resolved that I would think no more of this error of your youth, convinced that, after you had lived at court some time, and had acquired more knowledge of the nature of the connexions which alone are befitting to you, you would of your own accord take the necessary steps to release yourself from any conflicting influence. But now, I am to understand, that, with your habitual negligence, you have suffered that youthful folly to remain uncancelled. You are an example of how every evil grows which we have not the courage to attack ; for you are sacrificing the brilliant advantages of your high situation to an unworthy tie, which you persist in considering valid."

" No, no," interrupted Lionel ; " not unworthy, —a holy, sacred tie ! I am married ! I were a villain to deny it !"

“ That point I cannot dispute with you,” replied the maréchale, with great *sang-froid*. The court of peers could give you a verdict upon it. But I should indeed be ashamed, if my son were obliged to learn, from a court of justice, that no act of a minor, without the consent of his parents, has any legal validity ; and still more ashamed, if the heir of the house of Crécy-Chabanne should be ignorant that only by a marriage with an equal can he maintain his place in society. But it is needless to waste words upon this : I refer you to your confessor. Inquire of him what power such an heretical marriage has over a Roman Catholic, and you will blush to find how you have suffered yourself to be made the victim of this intrigue.”

“ Oh ! mother,” exclaimed Lionel, “ only allow me to state the case to you as it really stands. You have never found me headstrong or intractable. I acknowledge, with but too much sorrow, how rashly and inconsiderately I have acted, and how little suited the being, whom, of my own free choice, I have associated with my existence, is to the circumstances of my position, which now, for the first time, I fully appreciate. But I entreat you to be persuaded that this noble and innocent creature, and her father, both placed their trust in me—that they entertained not the smallest doubt of the legality of her marriage ; and consider that I, when I led her to the altar, was under the same conviction—that I made my vow to God with full and steadfast purpose of heart ! If you deny the legitimacy of this marriage, you will make my position only more painful. You cannot but see how

miserable I must feel to be the betrayer of the purest confidence ever reposed in man ; or to appear before the world as a fool, who rejects the favour of our great king, and mortally injures a girl, who, by her rank and merit, is worthy of the highest place."

The maréchale was silent for a moment. She considered, from the words he had just uttered, that her son was now sufficiently advanced to enable her to attain her object by sympathy.

" It is perhaps the weakness of a mother which inclines me to pity rather than to reproach you ; but when I see how this unfortunate affair has disturbed your mind, I cannot help feeling compassion, and I will forgive, in order to assist you."

Lionel fell at her feet, to press her proffered hand to his lips. So great was the power this woman had over him, that her promise to help him removed a load from his mind. She then proceeded quietly :—

" We must be agreed upon one point—that the union which has been contracted, whether of the importance that it appears to you, or of the insignificance which it really is, must, in any case, be set aside ; and, as I cannot give you any credit for much ability in the management of this affair, I should have been reluctant to give my consent to your return to St. Roche, had not your journey been mentioned by the king, which is equivalent to a command. It will also give you time to compose yourself, and recover such a tone of feeling as Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières is entitled to expect. But I desire that you will not prepare that young

and innocent creature for the fate which awaits her by a distinct exposition of your actual situation, or betray, by any coldness of behaviour, the estrangement of your affections. In the meantime, I will persuade the Marquis de Souvré, who has already been made the confidant of this unhappy event, to undertake the business again. He shall follow you to St. Roche, and settle and conclude all that remains to be done. You must previously confer with your confessor: he will tell you how grievously you have sinned by contracting a union with a heretic, and that the only way in which you can expiate your fault is by revoking it. The poor girl herself will not object to this, which is in perfect accordance with the customs of her country and the laxity of her so-called religion; for, as I am told, in that Protestant country, England, marriages are concluded and then dissolved again before a court of justice, thus shewing how binding such unions are there esteemed."

The maréchale perceiving the pain which her words had inflicted upon her son, and not wishing to provoke him to make any defence, continued, in a milder tone: "I will not seek to know what arrangements you may intend making for the satisfaction of your feelings. St. Roche is a residence which belongs to yourself alone; none of your family will ever intrude upon you there: the rents of the estate are ample enough to allow you to be liberal; and this person being for ever deprived of your name and all the privileges annexed to it, it behoves you to place her in an easy situation. But do not forget that your name can descend only to

the offspring of an equal marriage, sanctioned by the Church."

With sorrow must we confess that Lionel admitted the possibility of carrying out such a scheme, and that he felt it a relief from his own wavering and bewildered state of helplessness. Old prejudices now served to confirm the more convenient course, and gained the mastery; and what remained to be done was achieved by the confessor, who too easily satisfied Lionel, that a marriage with a heretic was not binding. With this preparation he set out upon his journey; and after this glance behind the scenes, we find him at the feet of Flora—his son in his arms.

And yet Lionel was no hypocrite! They were no falsehoods, when he poured into the ears of Flora words so delightful to her heart. And in truth this sphere of life was perhaps that to which his nature most inclined him, for he found in it all that his gentle and weak character required.

Nevertheless, we no longer recognise in Lionel the happy youth who so readily embraced the noblest views of life at Stirlingwood Abbey. He was again intoxicated by a new feeling of happiness; but the hardening of his heart, which had been so silently and secretly wrought by his own mother, counteracted the effects of this last great effort of nature. It produced no purifying influence, no impression but that of a momentary enthusiasm. This state was of short duration; and when recovered from his excitement, he thought of no measures which he could substitute for the plans devised by his mother, but was ready to carry them

out; his only anxiety being, to do so as delicately as possible. Flora's influence, which alone could have exercised any power over him, was now suspended, on account of the care and repose which her situation required. She submitted with patience to the doctor's injunctions of quiet, and solitude, and a darkened room; and thus Lionel was often separated from her, and withdrawn from the influence of that peculiar charm with which she knew how to invest all things around her. The contrast between the life he now led, and that which he had just quitted, produced a strong reaction; and the feverish excitement in which his days had been spent in the metropolis, now gave way to a languor which he attributed to his present dullness and loneliness. He had leisure in his solitary hours to repeat to himself that here he could no longer live happily, since he had learned to prefer a worldly life to one of inward peace.

The moment soon arrived which compelled him to acknowledge the situation in which he stood. The vicar reminded him, after the fourth day, that, according to the rules of the Church, the baptism of the infant could no longer be deferred, and Lionel assented with the same levity which would have caused his entire forgetfulness of the matter. He begged the vicar to settle with Amy Gray that the ceremony should be performed the next morning, and was about to take his leave, when the vicar inquired what was to be the name of the infant, as he wished to enter it that day into the register, leaving it ready for the signatures to be added in the church.

The recollection which this question aroused fell like a thunderbolt upon the young count. Delay, the usual resource of cowardice, as it spared him the necessity of immediate decision, was the mode of escape he had recourse to; and we must do him the justice to say, that he trembled with apprehension at his next step, the magnitude of which he beheld with despair. But he felt he could not retract, although he expected from it neither happiness nor enjoyment in the world. Conscious that the gates of Paradise were closed against him, he yet, like all weak characters, silenced his better feelings and persevered in his errors.

A pause ensued. But the steady gaze of the vicar, fixed upon him, reminded him that the shrewd man was watching him. This aroused his pride; for he had already learnt in the fashionable world how to assume the manner that is intended to denote superiority, and to forbid opposition.

“I will send you your instructions upon that point, sir,” he said, in a tone of voice which partook of the temper of his mind. “State what else is required.”

“Two witnesses. Have you fixed upon them?”

Lionel bit his lips; here again a direct answer was necessary. His thoughts quickly ran through the persons who composed the small circle. “Mademoiselle Veronica and the doctor will perhaps fulfil this office; I will make my request to them both myself.”

The vicar slightly bowed, and the young count hastened to put an end to this painful conversation.

But he durst not return where Flora lay wrapt in sweet dreams of her happiness. He rushed into the forest, decked in the full foliage of July; but he neither saw nor felt its beauties. Thus far he had been passively driven on to evil; *now* he was to take an active part, where hitherto he had only unwillingly endured. He was in a state of distraction, an intolerable weight oppressed him; and the youth who had always been led and directed, was wretched at having to decide for himself: this might have warned him that perhaps it was the last attempt of his good angel to save him.

When, later than usual, he repaired to Flora's bed-side, his decision was made. He looked coldly upon his wife and the slumbering babe on her bosom; he was inwardly conscious that he had severed himself from them; and in the same degree that he trembled at the injustice he was committing, was he hardened towards his victim. Flora, under the influence of a feverish fit, saw not the form of her beloved; he refused to take the child, which Amy Gray offered to give him, and only asked drily and abruptly, whether she had had an interview with the vicar. He wished to stifle all feelings of tenderness, in order to escape the pangs of remorse, and he experienced the fate of all weak irresolute men. Once embarked in the work, he outdid himself, and his resolution rose beyond the requisite point.

When, on the following morning, at the steps of the altar, the vicar inquired of the count the name of the child, he answered, in a loud harsh voice, "Reginald Crécy de St. Roche!"

The vicar paused for a moment ; then said, with an inquiring look to the count, “ Reginald, Count de Crécy ?”

“ Reginald Crécy de St. Roche !” hastily repeated Lionel, his colour suddenly changing, whilst his eye rested angrily on the young priest.

After a pause, the clergyman concluded the ceremony with this name. Scarcely was it over than the count hurried to the register, took the pen, and entered the name himself. When the witnesses signed, they saw that the name of Crécy stood as the christian, St. Roche as the family name.

No word of congratulation was uttered. The count stood in haughty silence until all had signed, then suddenly left the chapel ; and the poor dishonoured babe was carried back, unaccompanied, to the old castle, from which he was even obliged to borrow a name, being defrauded of his own by the man whose heart was becoming as hard as the stones which composed it.

Neither Amy Gray nor Flora heard what had occurred. Amy could not leave her dear mistress, and the maid, being a very ignorant person, understood nothing that had passed. Veronica, her brother, and the doctor, maintained a strict silence, from fear of occasioning a premature shock.

Flora now left her bed, and the beautiful summer weather admitted of her being carried out under the shade of the trees, her lovely infant on her lap, its dawning life enveloped in sleep, and guarded by love ! And where could be found a more perfect picture of maternal tenderness than

Flora? How lovely was this young, pale, and gentle mother, in all the charm of her peaceful joy! The harmony of her mind appeared in every feature, in every tone of her voice; there were no contending feelings; her affection for Lionel was one with her affection for her child.

Lionel had accomplished the hardest part of his task before he was exposed to the influence of these new impressions, and he now confronted them boldly; driven, by his conscience, from this paradise, he already felt the curse which was hovering above him. Although he had long learnt to trifle with crime, to follow its allurements, and had ceased to repel its temptations, he had now, for the first time, actually committed it; and he felt the awful difference between such a voluntary act and a negative acquiescence. It was because he was not yet completely depraved, that this step so grievously affected him. It wrought in him a kind of frenzy—a mixture of despair, grief, and gloomy misanthropy; whilst a voice of mockery seemed to be perpetually repeating to him, “On! on! there is no retreat—no rescue!”

How quickly would Flora have perceived the change in Lionel had it not been for the lovely child at her bosom, which shielded her against all the assaults of the world. But the time must come when the illusion would be dispelled.

With her returning strength, Flora also recovered her mental energy. She was now more with Lionel, and her quick penetration soon made her aware of the change.

“Ah! Lionel,” said she, “I have learnt from

Lesueur a great deal about that wicked world in which you are obliged to live, and it has grieved me much on your account. How painful it must be to live there, and how much I feel for all you must have to endure. You have lost your cheerful looks—your eyes betray the sadness of your spirit."

Lionel forced a smile—it was a faint and bitter one, and in itself conveyed an answer, but one which Flora could not understand; and as he did not speak, she continued, "Tell me, can you now remain with me here in this beautiful world, or must I go with you to that other?"

Great was the commotion now aroused in Lionel's breast. "Ah!" said he, inwardly, "why will you drive me on to that abyss which I would still conceal from you?" Confounded by despair, he reproached her for obliging him to avow how unhappy he had determined to make her. Who could analyse the agonising pain he felt as he opened his lips to reply?

"Neither the one nor the other. I can neither quit the world which the sickly dreamer Lesueur has described as so wicked, nor take you there; for one thing is certain, that world would not suit you, and in it you would find no place."

"So I always thought," said Flora, tranquilly; "and your entreaties alone could have induced me to venture there; for we are commanded not to put ourselves in the way of evil, because, like dust in the air, it comes in contact with us unawares, and sullies the purity of our minds. But your home is not there, and so why will you go back

when it makes you sad, and grieves your noble soul?"

Lionel's heart was ready to burst. He could have trampled the world under his feet. "Monstrous!" he inwardly exclaimed. Whether applied to himself or to others, he knew not; but the first evil action he had committed had taken the reins from his hand, and he pursued his onward course, maddened by the pain which it inflicted upon him.

"There you are mistaken; my home can not be here. The duties which, as a vassal of the crown, I owe to my king and country, require from me a mode of life very different from the indolent existence which I should lead here."

"Ah!" exclaimed Flora, "that sounds well; and now I comprehend your high destination: tell me a great deal about it. You are right in choosing an active and vigorous life; a man ought to do so. It raises the soul, and brings man nearer to God. How I congratulate you upon so noble a career, my dearest Lionel! How proud I feel of it, and how well I can now understand that the poor trivial life of which Lesueur spoke could have no charm for you! But," continued she, "into that noble world which you have formed for yourself, surely I can follow you! It is exactly what, till I heard poor Lesueur's complaints, I had imagined it."

"Lesueur can know but little of the world to which I belong," replied Lionel, coldly and haughtily; "and as little is it possible for you to follow me there. I shall continue to return from

time to time to St. Roche, and no change will be made in your condition here; but there, your birth would not admit of your sharing my rank, and we should be obliged to live as much apart as if you were here and I there."

"What do you mean? I don't understand you!" exclaimed Flora, and a feeling of pride and mortification called the colour into her cheek. "As I am your wife, I am the same that you are; and my father was not inferior to yours—superior, indeed, by his priestly office."

Lionel could with difficulty suppress a shrug of the shoulders. Avoiding any answer, he continued, restlessly stripping off the green and mossy turf with his foot, "The king has appointed me equerry to the queen. Her majesty will follow the king to the camp, and I must return as soon as the news arrives that the army has commenced its march."

"Did you not tell the king, then, how long you had been parted from me, Lionel?" said Flora, bursting into tears. "He, who seems to be so good and so wise, he would surely have exempted you from this hard service?"

Had Lionel looked up and beheld the change which his cold and heartless reply had produced on Flora's lovely face, he must have recoiled from himself with horror. But he fixed his gloomy looks upon the earth, which he continued to tear up, and found courage to proceed in his cruelty.

"The king knows nothing of my marriage with you! Too late I have made the discovery, that families related to his majesty, as mine is, have not

the power to marry without his consent, and that he is very tenacious of their forming alliances only with the highest nobility of France. He usually selects the parties himself, and any other arrangement provokes his severe resentment."

"Then Lesueur was right: your king is not the true minister of God's mercy here upon earth, who is specially appointed to dispense justice; and you," she proceeded, earnestly, as she rose and stood erect before him, "you are misled by that wicked world, and have acted a timid and unworthy part, just such as I observed in Lesueur. Nothing that you have now spoken is right in the sight of God; and if, in your world, principles be maintained which are repugnant to His laws, how wonderful is it that wise and good men should there find a standard by which to measure their actions, and should not perceive its utter worthlessness! But you are all so afraid of one another there, that you cease to fear God, and so at last you become faint-hearted, and your mind falls into an unhealthy state. Lionel! — my poor dear Lionel! — they have caused you to sin, too! For you committed a sin in not vindicating your sacred rights before the king, and in not telling him that you had a wife—that, before you were aware of his claims upon you, you had bound yourself to her by holy vows, and, therefore, could belong to him only in so far as she could also. But God forbid that I should accompany you to the camp, which is no place for a Christian woman! The king has given you an office which, as I have been told by Lesueur, is paltry and insignificant—an idle place

in which you are not of half the importance that our servants are to us. And do you consider *that* a service befitting a man—a vassal of the king, as you called yourself just now, and for which I honoured you, hoping that you would nobly serve your country?"

It would be impossible to describe what Lionel felt during this energetic reproof. It was very similar to what he had experienced when last with his father: here, as there, he encountered principles so inflexible in their several ways as to render any contest useless. With hopelessness of being understood were mingled other feelings: anger towards Flora on account of the false position in which he had placed her, and shame at hearing the objects, to obtain which he had sacrificed his better principles, stigmatised as low and worthless, and his conduct denounced as rebellious against God.

"Flora, Flora," said he, with a cold sarcastic smile, "you have accustomed yourself to preach to Lesueur till you have acquired the habit. I think you are severe. Consider, too, whether this is a duty always incumbent upon you, and whether Lesueur and I stand in the same relation to you?"

Flora, who was still very weak, and had but little of her former energy, now sank back, broken and subdued. "Ah," said she, "you are right; that is a perverted world in which the feeble wife rebukes her lord. How came I to think that I might deal the same measure to you and to Lesueur? How sad this is! and how it takes from me all spirit, all hope! Save me from this sorrow," she added, in a faint voice; "restore com-

fort to my heart, and relieve me from my dreadful fears for your soul!"

She made a sign to Amy Gray, who had just appeared at the entrance of the castle, and leaning on her arm, with colourless lips and eyes full of tears, she feebly moved towards her bed-room.

Lionel let her go without one kind word or proffer of support. He did not follow her, or even look after her. He sat motionless, where she left him—the brand of Cain upon his brow! His weak spirit was without resource, and he heard only the persevering voice of the tempter—"It is too late—all is lost!"

From that time Flora remained silent and thoughtful. She did not regain her strength as fast as was at first expected. She often looked at Lionel as a mother would do who is uneasy about her child; but she said nothing more. She reproached herself for chiding her husband, much more severely than Lionel could have imagined possible. This made her timid and reserved, and her bodily weakness depressed her spirits. Occupied by the care of her child, the course of her existence flowed on in innocence, and without further disturbance. Lionel, also, found a temporary relief, for no opportunity presented itself of taking measures to regain his liberty.

This delusive calm was interrupted by a letter from his mother, enclosing one from the Marquis de Vieuville, enjoining Lionel's immediate return to the duties of his office. The maréchale added, that the Marquis de Souvré had at length consented to go and fetch him from St. Roche, and conclude

the business there, and that he would immediately follow, if not precede, her letter.

“Ah!” sighed Lionel, “now I must go. That cannot be avoided; and Souvré will manage the rest.”

He went directly to Flora’s room, to communicate this intelligence. He found his lovely young wife, her face as white as the drapery which hung in ample folds around her, and sitting with her infant slumbering on her lap. She was smiling in rapture over its tiny form; and when she saw Lionel enter, she beckoned to him, and invited him to admire its delicate little fingers.

“Ah! Lionel,” she said, “this little creature will by and bye think and feel as we do, and discern between good and evil. Those little hands will, some day, be folded in prayer, like ours. How wondrously beautiful are all things upon earth! We have but to behold, in order to adore.”

Lionel drew back the hand which held the Marquis de Vieuville’s letter. He could not disturb such peaceful happiness—she looked so beautiful, so angelic! The ice upon his heart was melting fast. He knelt down—he kissed the slumbering babe. Tenderness and compassion overcame him! He was going to abandon her, and then to injure her in the most iniquitous manner; and this soft and gentle being would be overwhelmed by the intenseness of her grief! His nerves were racked at the thought, and the tears coursed each other down his cheeks. “Oh! what can I do to save us both?” tremblingly he asked

himself. "I am condemned to endless misery both here and yonder!" His sighs reached Flora's ear.

"What is the matter, my dearest?" asked she, softly.

"Oh! Flora," he exclaimed, with all his former affection, "weep for me. I am very, very unhappy! Whatever I may do, do not condemn me. Guilty I shall be; but ever much, much more miserable than guilty!"

His head sank down upon Flora's lap, beside his child. A deep silence ensued—such a silence as follows when sentence has been passed upon the criminal. He was overwhelmed by the fate which he had provoked.

"You know," said Flora, "that I once failed in my duty, and reprimanded you, which did not become a wife; and, since that time, I have always felt miserable when you have said any thing that is not right in the sight of God, because then it has made me wish to check you. And you know what I do then." She stopped, too timid to proceed, and only softly laid her hand upon his burning head.

"Ah, Flora, chastising angel! you have not been able to guard that paradise, at the gates of which you once stood with the flaming sword. I am now expelled from it, and you are unintentionally driving me farther and farther away by your words!"

"O no, no, do not say so! for then I have unconsciously committed a great sin, and that would be a great affliction to me! Pray, then, Lionel;

and, whilst you pray, remember that we ought not to consider ourselves so lost in sin as you said just now ; for your soul is in the hands of God, and he can heal it, if only you will confide in Him ; for without faith no repentance can be efficacious," she continued, bending timidly over the still silent Lionel. "I do not exactly know what your transgression has been. You are very unhappy. That I feel. You spoke, too, of the corrupt principles of that strange world ; but if you do not act in unison with them, they can have no power over you."

"Alas !" cried Lionel, whose whole frame seemed convulsed by grief, "they have acquired power over me. I have acted in unison with them, and am lost and undone both here and hereafter !"

Flora rose and stood before him, pale as death, holding the child to her bosom. She then said, in a low but earnest and agitated voice, "Lionel, we will pray together. Your wife must not now be parted from you. I know not how to support you ; prayer will direct us."

She was going to put the sleeping babe into its cradle, when sounds were heard in the anteroom, —doors opening,—footsteps approaching. A servant appeared, and had scarcely time to announce "the Marquis de Souvré," before he had entered the room. Flora uttered a low shriek,—the child awoke,—Lionel sprang up from his knees.

The marquis stood gazing at the group he had thus disturbed with a smile of contempt, well pleased to be regarded as the destroyer of their happiness.

"What a pastoral scene !" he exclaimed, while

both remained silent. "In truth, one might fancy oneself to be moved back some centuries."

This enraged Lionel. "I suppose, marquis, that human nature has continued the same in all ages."

"Perhaps,—may be so," answered Souvré, with that air of nonchalance which had always the effect of imposing on Lionel, and making him waver. "You know I have no time to think of such matters. In our rank of life, we are obliged to adapt ourselves to the circumstances of the moment. However, I will not discuss the subject. But, Crécy, suppose you do the honours of your house! for this little lady," continued he, slightly bowing to Flora, "does not seem inclined to do so, and I have travelled at a furious rate to get to this old owl's nest of your's, and I require some rest."

He laid hold of Lionel's arm, in order to draw him away. This aroused Flora. She advanced towards them, and fixed her large anxious eyes so steadfastly upon the marquis, that he was unable to stand their gaze. "Touch him not!" she then said, in a hollow voice; "touch him not! You can have no part in him. And you, Lionel, go not with him; he is wicked, and you are lost if you go with him!"

Quick and ready as was Souvré's ordinary presence of mind, it was hitherto more with the impertinences of the great world that he had had to deal: here he was scorned and rejected in a manner which he could not turn into a jest, or retort with a *bon mot*. Her solemnity, aided as it was by beauty almost superhuman, overpowered him

with the might of truth ; and the energetic manner in which she had so fearlessly designated him, was so impressive, that he was unable to stir, and for a moment stood awe-struck, as if he had received a sentence of condemnation.

But what could have power over him long against his will ? Enraged and almost terrified by her influence over him, he exclaimed, and a harsh, discordant laugh burst from his lips, “ Upon my word, your little lady is the most charming tragic actress I ever saw ! But we will defer this to another time ; I am too tired. Come, Lionel ; a bed will be pleasanter to me now, than any dramatic exhibition !”

Terrified by Souvré’s laugh, Flora had thrown herself into Lionel’s arms, from whence she looked round to him with fear and trembling.

“ Beware of him !” she said, with a shudder ; “ he has fallen from God. Do you not feel it ? Oh, stay with me till he is gone !” she said imploringly to Lionel, who was gently trying to disengage himself from her ; “ stay with me till he is gone, or he will do you some injury !”

Souvré laughed again. Lionel led her back to her seat.

“ Compose yourself, Flora. He is the same person who once before frightened you in so extraordinary a manner. Do you know him again ?”

“ Yes, I know him again,” said Flora, in a faint voice. “ I feel the same pang through my heart ; —it is not without a cause. Oh, save yourself ! save yourself ! He will drag you to perdition !”

“ Calm yourself, dearest Flora,” said Lionel,

tenderly. "I will take him away—I will take him away from you, and your anguish will subside. You will be calmer presently."

"Oh, do not—do not go, or it will be my death!" faintly stammered Flora, looking as if she were indeed going to die at that moment. "If he takes you away, we never shall meet again. Your soul will be destroyed by the Evil One, my body by death!"

Her head fell back, her feeble hands could no longer detain him. Lionel's heart was bursting with grief; but the look of scorn and insult which Souvré fixed upon him was more than he could bear, and made his blood boil. He sprang up, and tore himself from the grasp of Flora's powerless hands: he heard her feeble scream, he saw her languid eyes still following him; and, calling Amy, he dragged Souvré away with him—he hoped for a few minutes only. As the door closed, Flora's eyes closed also, and her grief was veiled in a blessed state of insensibility.

With an expression of gloomy sternness, Amy stood by her side. To judge from her countenance, one might have thought that she wished her darling were indeed dead, as she then seemed to be. She made no attempt to restore her to animation, but her dark look was fixed upon the door, and no words could convey a menace of hatred and vengeance more significantly than did that look!

At length Flora opened her eyes; but she lay in the same apparently lifeless state. Amy Gray paced to and fro in silence. The child was asleep again;

the mother thought not of it, her senses seemed locked. Amy at last opened the window ; the evening air poured in, and Flora revived.

“Where is he ?” were the first words she uttered.

“If you mean the count,” replied Amy, “he is with the marquis.”

“O God, be merciful !” ejaculated Flora, and she hid her face. A profound silence reigned : she seemed to be praying. At length, overcome by exhaustion, sleep fell upon her heavy eyelids.

The evening sun cast bright rays of light into that pretty apartment. The windows looked out upon the beautiful vale of St. Roche. Beyond the flower-garden and shrubberies which immediately surrounded the house lay the forest in all the bright and sunny tints of summer, and the road which wound through the meadows ; all spoke of beauty, affluence, and enjoyment. Flora alone, oppressed by the burden at her heart, breathed uneasily in her short slumbers : her cheeks grew paler, and her eyes were but half closed.

Amy heard steps approaching ; she tore herself from the sad contemplation of her darling, and gently opened the door. The Marquis de Souvré entered.

“My good woman,” said he, “I want to speak to your mistress ; let me approach her.”

“There she is,” answered Amy, with a look of the bitterest hatred. “If she is not dying fast enough for you, you will soon succeed in completing your work.”

“Truly this old witches’ castle contains very suitable inhabitants,” said Souvré, laughing. “But

a rational man would but lose his patience in talking to you."

"*You, indeed, might easily lose it,*" was Amy's ready answer. "But I prophecy that you will keep it until you have perpetrated all the crimes you meditate."

"So much the better. But you, my good girl, are not worth wasting words upon. Stand aside, —see, your mistress is awake!"

"Who is there?" inquired Flora, shuddering. "Ah! my evil genius!" she added, recognising him.

"I hope," said he, approaching her, but at the same time averting his eyes, and examining the room with the most perfect *nonchalance*, "I hope you have got over the slight indisposition with which you honour me each time I make my appearance. It is the more *réquise* you should, as we must converse upon some matters which are of importance to your future life."

"Where is Lionel?" asked Flora, raising herself.

"I will answer that presently," said Souvré, coolly, as he cast a look through the window. "He is not with me, as you perceive."

"That is well," answered Flora, quietly; "when he is not with you, I can more easily endure your presence. You have no power over me."

"Indeed!" said Souvré, looking maliciously at her; "we shall see. As you are so well prepared for me, any *ménagement* will be needless. We will see whether I have no power over you."

"Over my earthly fate you certainly have," said she; "*that* I can feel whenever I see you. It is over my soul, I mean, that you have no power;

and I have more strength when I am alone with you. When Lionel is by, I can only feel the injury you have done him, and my grief gets the better of me."

" You are not reserved in expressing your opinions, I must confess. However, I am to conclude that you give the tone on which our discussion is to be conducted. Therefore, listen : I have, out of friendship to the family of the Count de Crécy-Chabanne, undertaken the task of extricating Lionel, the young count and sole heir, from an union into which his thoughtlessness and ignorance, and, I readily grant, your pretty face, and the too willing hospitality of your father, have led him. The young man could not return to his noble relatives without feeling how inadmissible such an apparent union must be ; for in no respect, either by his parents, or by his king, or by his church, could this lightly formed contract be acknowledged. I have, therefore, taken upon myself to inform you of this, as you are ignorant of the world, and also to make arrangements that the situation of yourself and your child should be as comfortable as you have a right to demand from a man who possesses so good an independent fortune as the young Count de Crécy."

" I cannot yet understand you," replied Flora, quietly ; " for what you say is all erroneous. I do not know what opinion you have formed of our marriage. The service may indeed be differently performed in the Roman Catholic Church, but it must be the same in spirit, otherwise your's would be no Christian rite."

“ Must I for ever contend with your obstinate prejudices ? ” said Souvré, rising from his seat in an ill-humour. “ Is not what I tell you comprehensible ? You are not married according to the rites of the Catholic Church, and your apparent union is therefore perfectly null and void. No one regards you as the count’s wife, nor that child as legitimate. This I am obliged to explain to you, in order that you may sign a kind of declaration, which I have brought with me, and which will effect, according to your ideas, a legal dissolution of that ceremony upon which you seem to rest your faith, and restore liberty to the young count, who is destined to make a high marriage at court.”

Flora rose slowly, but steadily, holding by the arm of the chair to support herself: her figure seemed to grow in height; the faithless blood, which had oppressed her heart to bursting, rushed back into her cheeks. She was now completely undeceived. A short, wild shriek burst from her compressed lips, and freed her utterance ; then, in a hollow voice, but with calm dignity, she said : “ You do not belong to God, and are ignorant of his holy commandments. In what name am I to speak to you ? Unhappy, lost man ! the contemptible baseness of your speech condemns you so fearfully, that I tremble before that God whose judgments are already suspended over you for your cruel, wicked words. Poor, miserable creature ! what anguish will be yours, when God disperses the mist in which the miserable worthlessness of your being is hidden even from your own eyes, and you are revealed to yourself ! How could you,

the guilty tool of that corrupt world from which you are sent, inspire me with any doubts of the sacredness of my marriage, or of the birth of my child?"

Why did not Souvré interrupt this speech? and why stood he near her chair, with averted face? When, at length, he turned, her aspect seemed to petrify him.

Flora would now have left him. With a firm step, and dignity in every movement, she passed by him. This roused him. His consciousness returned, and with it the most furious rage. She had depicted him as he was. This insignificant, slighted being had pronounced aloud, what the taunting fiend within his bosom had confirmed with scornful derision. Whilst she spoke, his soul was laid bare, and "Vengeance! vengeance!" was the only cry of his exasperated heart.

"Stop!" cried he, in a hoarse voice, and with distorted features; "stop! You shall not go till you have signed this paper; and thank God that I have patience for any further dealings with you."

Flora rejected the paper with a motion of her hand. "I will inquire of Lionel's noble mother, how honourable a place she allows to the wife of her son. From you I desire nothing but your absence. You, poor despicable sinner, have no power to degrade me!"

The mention of Lionel's mother gave a fresh impetus to the marquis's ill-humour. "Fool!" said he, "that is all that is yet wanting to your childish arrogance! She is the very person who sent me here to represent your folly to you; for

she regards you as nothing more than the mistress of her son, although she is perfectly aware of your imaginary claims. She has chosen a bride for her son worthy of him, and looks down upon you with contempt!"

Flora stood motionless, then lifting up her hands and eyes to heaven, "O God, have mercy upon me! I fear that you speak the truth. My confidence in this once revered woman had been much shaken by many things which Lesueur told me. Oh, how I pity her!"

"You had better keep your pity for yourself; you have most need of it," said Souvré, rudely; "but I hope that now you see yourself deserted by all on whom you leant for support, you will not delay putting your signature to this paper. In it you renounce all lawful claims on the Count de Crécy-Chabanne, for yourself and your child; you re-assume the name of Lester, and it secures to you an income which will be a comfortable provision for you both, with liberty to return to England, or to remain here at St. Roche, without further molestation; but there must be no attempt on your part to cause further disturbance to the peace of the Crécy family."

"Did Lionel's mother send me that message?" exclaimed Flora, sorrowfully; "and did she think I could receive it? Can a woman make such a demand from a woman?—a mother from a mother? Well, this degenerate world will learn the full weight of those sacred words which she rejects in defiance of God." She advanced a few steps, and stood before the marquis. "Go, go," said she, with

vehemence ; “ tell her that no human power can put asunder those whom God has joined together by his anointed ministers, and by the vows of the hearts which he united on that day. Tell her that I am the lawful wife of her son. I, Flora Lester, whose father was descended from a noble English family, and in holy orders, am in no respect beneath her. Tell her that the child,—the offspring of this lawful marriage,—the only rightful heir of her son, as well as I, his mother, can and will bear the name of Crécy-Chabanne ; and if she requires any further witness than the leaf of the church register, which Amy Gray brought away, and has preserved, she may ask her son, and see if he will desire to deny it ! ”

Souvré’s looks shewed how complete was his triumph over his victim. With the most provoking smile, he said, “ I believe he *will* have that desire ! for it is his wish that you should consent to this arrangement. Fearing his own weakness and your impetuous nature, he has put the whole business into my hands. He hopes I shall bring back this paper signed.”

“ God forbid that this should be true ! Where is Lionel ? I must immediately see him, and confront him with you.”

Souvré shrugged his shoulders. “ That is no longer possible ; his instant return was ordered by the king. He must be at court by a stated hour. Look there, and you will no longer doubt the truth.”

Flora looked at him with terror. She allowed herself to be led by him to the window ; her eyes

followed the direction in which he pointed, and she saw Lionel's travelling-carriage going at great speed along the road through the valley. She recognised his equipage—his liveries.

“Lionel! Lionel!” she uttered, in broken accents, and grasped some branches which hung against the window. She stood with her eyes riveted to the fatal spot. Souvré—for we will not suppress the only symptom of humanity he ever shewed—Souvré shuddered as he saw her paleness increase to an almost livid hue, and her eyes and all her features as if turning to marble. He spoke to her,—he hoped to arouse her, were it even by the aversion with which he inspired her. But in vain. She heard nothing more. Her eyes were fixed upon the rapidly-diminishing carriage. It disappeared. “Lionel!” she repeated, in a scarcely audible voice; but she remained standing in the same immovable posture.

The Marquis de Souvré became like one possessed. He rushed out of the room, as if the sight of her were his sentence of death. Amy Gray sat cowering outside the door. “Go in! go—go!” he cried, wildly, and rushed through the apartments and passages to his own room.

Amy knew all. She shed no tear—she uttered no groan. Her deep resentment left no place for softer emotions; even for the dear object of her affections she had no gentle word. “Come it must; I knew that beforehand. She pays for it with her life. May she now be released!” She would have rejoiced in her death.

Flora stood till spasms stopped the beating of her

heart, and her feet gave way beneath her. She looked so like a corpse, that it was rumoured that she was dead, and the doctor himself was long doubtful of her life. When she at length revived, the dreadful night was over. The Marquis de Souvré had come several times to inquire; Amy had never given him any answer. He had advanced to the bed; she did not prevent his seeing the corpse, as she imagined it. Towards dawn he set out. "The most unpleasant journey I ever made in my life!" said he, peevishly. "What a poor weak creature to die!—to die at once!"

The thought afterwards occurred to him, that though her death emancipated Lionel, it would for ever weigh on his conscience; and this comforted him.

But death had not released Flora; and with her waking, complete consciousness returned. As Amy had not undressed her, she immediately arose, and the anguish of her soul appeared in every movement.

"But, Amy," said she, softly, "he did love me so much!" Then she began to walk about the room in a manner which, after a time, filled all around her with despair. She paced continually backwards and forwards between the window where she had received her death-blow and the farther corner of the room. She heard nothing—she saw nothing that passed around her. When she was spoken to, she would stand still and repeat, "He loved me so much." None could look at the expression of her angelic face without shedding tears. She said the same words to her infant, and seemed not to recognise it.

Amy shewed no surprise. She had foreseen it all, and now proceeded to act according to the resolutions she had already formed. Towards evening a peasant's wife came to the castle, leaving her own child, to nurse the poor deserted baby, who was famishing, its mother being no longer able to afford to it wholesome sustenance.

The night passed ; Flora still walked to and fro in the room. The doctor and Amy sat together in mute silence. No one dared to touch her ; it seemed to augment her anguish. And who could have used force with her ? But gradually her pallor vanished, a high colour rose to her cheek, a burning fever seized her ; she only paced the room more vehemently.

“ Be comforted,” said the doctor to Amy ; “ she will not outlive this ; the fever which is now coming on, so soon after her lying-in, will be her death.”

“ Then God be praised ! ” cried Amy, wildly. “ This wicked world, into which she has been thrown, is no fit place for such as her.”

The rising fever caused Flora to break the silence she had kept. At first she began muttering softly—then louder ; she laughed, she skipped she ran—still beautiful, and like a happy child. Under the dominion of her malady, she fancied herself at Stirlingwood—she called her father, and smiled upon him—she seemed to have no recollection of her later life ; her childhood—Amy—her father—her picture-books — the wood — such a pretty and touching tissue of thoughts did her fancy wildly string together. This melted Amy’s

heart ; her misery burst forth in sobs, almost amounting to screams ; but Flora, who had always so tenderly inquired the cause of Amy's faintest sigh, now laughed at her convulsive sobs. The doctor, who watched her with the most earnest attention, then perceived that the fever produced thirst, which was what he hoped and expected. He immediately offered her a cup containing a sleeping draught which he had ready, and on which alone he grounded any hopes. He was not mistaken ; she drank it with childish eagerness, and called it "milk from Stirlingwood !" Her steps then began to drag—her words to falter—her eyelids dropped. Amy had already dried her tears ; she carried the darling of her heart without resistance, and laid her on her long forsaken-bed, and sleep soon shed its soothing blessing over the work of devastation wrought by the hand of man.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE Maréchale de Crécy sat in her dressing-room listening to the innocent Louise, who was talking to her about the young Marquis d'Anville, with whom she had danced the preceding evening at the Duchess de Lesdiguières' ball, telling her that he was so lively and agreeable, and that he always reminded her of Lionel, with whom she used to laugh and joke in the same way. The maréchale had no objection to this. She understood exactly how the case stood with Louise—she knew perfectly well that the likenesses which sisters, who are very fond of their brothers, find for them, generally lead on to a different kind of feeling. The young marquis, who was nineteen years old, was destined for her daughter; but, as the marriage was not to take place for three years, the young man was to be absent till that time, first at the seat of war, and afterwards on his travels.

She let Louise talk on without interrupting her, only by an occasional word strengthening the impression already made, and inwardly amused at the guilelessness of the lovely child, when suddenly this confidential dialogue was stopped by the entrance of him whom Louise had adverted to for the explanation of her feelings—Lionel stood before them.

But how little did he now resemble the description of the lively young Marquis d'Anville ! Even the imperturbable maréchale was shocked by his appearance, and the thought flashed like lightning through her brain, "Behold your work!"

Louise flew with a scream of delight into his arms. But Lionel shuddered as he pressed another to that bosom from which he had just driven Flora. The maréchale saw it all: she almost trembled at his presence; for it shewed that all she had planned was achieved, and with this conviction came a transient feeling of horror: she was less courageous after the accomplishment than during the pursuit of her designs.

"Lionel, you are ill," exclaimed Louise, as he silently and faintly disengaged himself from her, to accost his mother; "I hardly knew you again."

"Indeed, my dear," said the maréchale, "you look shockingly—you must see a doctor—you have no time to be ill now."

"A confessor, rather, madam!" replied Lionel, in a hollow and bitter tone; "he is more needful."

"That is as your case may be," said his mother, offended by this rebuke. "The soul often stands in as much need of a doctor as the body. The king is already gone to the army; the queen is to rejoin his majesty at Nancy."

Lionel inquired whether the queen were still at Versailles.

"Their majesties have granted the petition of their good city of Paris, to revisit the Tuilleries before their departure. Paris is now a scene of rejoicings. The streets are turned into gardens, in

which the people dance and play ; the two queens, surrounded by their whole court, traverse them in triumphal cars. Our carriages are packed ; we only waited for your return to set out for the Hôtel Soubise, so make your arrangements immediately."

"It will be impossible for me to accompany you immediately to court," replied Lionel ; "I feel very unwell ; some rest is absolutely necessary for me."

Madame de Crécy would have disputed this point with her son ; but she looked at him, and the conviction of his illness struck her with renewed force. Anxious as she was to blind herself to it, the case was too palpable—he was certainly ill—or, at all events, not in a state in which she would wish him to appear. Accordingly they separated. No word had been spoken that could relieve Lionel's overcharged heart. This hardened woman, who had not hesitated to instigate him to commit the crime which weighed so heavily upon him, shewed such perfect indifference as even to make no inquiry whether or how it had been accomplished. No word of compassion, no thanks nor approbation were expressed—nothing that could tend to reconcile him to the dreadful step he had taken. He was overwhelmed by feelings which were repelled as if their very existence were deemed impossible ; and, in exchange for this, were offered to him the worthless distinctions of the world. His heart seemed to contract from excess of grief ; deep and gloomy anger against himself and all the world took possession of him ; the

opinion he now formed of his mother was very different from that which his filial enthusiasm had formerly inspired. An awful judgment had fallen upon him, and he reaped the chastisement of his guilt: the prize for which he had sinned lost its value the moment he had gained it. This brilliant court appeared to him a hell, which stifled every recollection, and repelled every affection not in accordance with its artificial atmosphere. At the same time it seemed to him a waste—dull, unattractive, and joyless.

He sank down on his couch almost in a state of insensibility, and none of those around him ventured to disturb the young heir, whose appearance so ill corresponded with his brilliant prospects.

The carriages of the maréchale soon drove to the door, and, after giving the necessary directions to her physician and her confessor, she left the Hôtel de Crécy without again seeing her son, or permitting the sorrowful Louise to do so.

Upon this occasion she thought the marshal might be useful to her. He was already at Paris, but she knew that she had only to inform him of Lionel's illness at Versailles to secure his going there immediately; and unquestionably he would not think Lionel's illness of sufficient magnitude to keep him away from that theatre upon which his heart yearned to see him. Madame de Crécy, however, put on the face of an anxious mother, to announce Lionel's indisposition to the queen and his now openly declared bride.

In the bustle which then prevailed at Paris, this announcement was somewhat carelessly received.

Victorine only, who kept much to herself, and did not mix in the fêtes more than was necessary, changed colour when she heard the maréchale's news; and when the marshal, equipped in his travelling dress, came to say a few cheering words to her before he set out, she felt the tenderness of a daughter towards him, and they separated with increased mutual affection.

Victorine was much more affectionately disposed to her future father-in-law than to the maréchale, whom she mistrusted. That accomplished dissembler, who always adapted herself to the exigencies of the moment, was quite unsuited to the open character of Victorine, which had been developed and cultivated by as sound an education as the times would permit. She had a quick discernment, and, when her suspicions were excited, she was seldom wrong.

On the following evening the queen gave a brilliant farewell ball. Victorine was standing next to her mother-in-law elect, in the queen's card-room, adjoining the drawingroom, when suddenly the maréchale, with a look of alarm, fixed her eyes upon the door. Victorine's eyes followed, being unable to guess the cause, until she descried the Marquis de Souvré, who, with his usual air of assurance, smiling and nodding, was pressing through the crowd. She fancied this might explain the cause of the maréchale's emotion. "He comes from Lionel's sick-room," thought she; and, tremulous with anxiety herself, she felt softened towards the maréchale, thinking within herself "She has, then, the feelings of a mother."

Souvré stood before them the next moment. "Welcome, marquis," said the maréchale; "how have you left my son?"

"On his way to complete his recovery at the feet of his fair bride," replied the marquis, as he made his bow to both ladies. "I quitted the ground the moment the marshal took up his position there. So able a commander being on the spot, I was glad to return immediately, for he is always victorious, as Madame la Maréchale is well aware."

"The marshal has still all the delightful eagerness of youth," said the maréchale, with a smile, but fixing a searching look upon Souvré, who took care not to betray, by the slightest word, what she so anxiously wished to know.

"Tell me whether I heard aright, that this is a *farewell* ball?" inquired he, turning towards Victorine. "Will Lionel indeed arrive too late to exhibit his immense happiness in the midst of all this splendour?"

"Their majesties will go to-morrow to pass the time of their devotions at the Carmelites, and after that they will receive small parties only in the private apartments," replied Victorine.

"Ah," said Souvré, "that revives me. I hope then we shall still, in a small circle of some hundred people, celebrate the marriage of my happy cousin and his lovely bride."

"We will not speak of that," said Victorine; and, flirting her fan, she vanished into the next room.

Madame de Crécy then turned towards Souvré,

resolved to bring him to a parley; but he rushed away to make his bow to the Duchesse de Bellefonds, who was making her progress through the room to detect any breach of etiquette.

“Can I afford you any assistance, my protectress?” said he. “Your talent of control must find full scope here, where the good citizens of Paris are brought into such close contact with the royal ermine. The atmosphere is somewhat affected by them.”

“Ah, marquis, marquis!” replied Madame de Bellefonds, in a voice so gruff that it sounded like the roaring of an angry bear, “I trust I shall not have to go through that a second time! Just fancy! the whole day long in the streets—the mob squeezing and pressing against the queen—addresses to be received in the open air—knowing nothing of the names, much less of the condition, of the creatures who presented them, ay, and not wishing to know anything about them, for there was nothing to be known but that they were the dregs of the people, all calling themselves citizens of Paris. Citizens of Paris, marquis! I could have cried at the vanity which made them think *that* a title of admission to the queen. And then the notions of forbearance entertained by the nobility! None would venture to keep them within their due limits, so the audacity of the people grew quite rampant. Can you imagine that it was actually in question to invite some of the deputies of the city here this evening? So then there would not have been a place left unpolluted. But I threatened to break my white wand if such an enormity

were perpetrated, and that put an end to it, notwithstanding that the Marquis de Fénélon, who is looked upon as such a wonderful genius, asked me, 'if I thought that these gentleman deputies, who had millions at their command, had less good-breeding than my dukes and marquises ?'

" Well, in truth," said Souvré, smiling, "such an extravagant idea was enough to have killed your grace."

" Almost, marquis, really it almost did; and you may hear by my voice how it has affected my chest. It was my last effort, and the answer which I gave him fairly took away my voice. ' Marquis,' said I, ' so much the worse, if spades and mattocks and yard-measures are concealed under whited sepulchres. The fellow who makes my shoes stands higher in my estimation than these impertinent masqueraders, who presume to usurp our privileges.' "

" Excellent ! excellent ! " exclaimed Souvré ; " how cleverly you express your sentiments ! they ought to be handed down to posterity. Heaven be praised that France has got a Duchesse de Bellefonds to keep watch before the throne of our gentle indulgent queen ! It is our only safeguard against the march of intellect, which, as I have been seriously informed, excites the vulgar herd to imitate those of higher station ; and, however ridiculous and unsuccessful such attempts may be, still they are an annoyance, and shew a dangerous spirit, which ought to be nipped in the bud."

" Yes, indeed, marquis ; you are quite right. But, I beseech you, cease to speak of it, or I shall

require my smelling-bottle. Ah, marquis, why should it be necessary ever to throw words away upon that class? Formerly, our *maitres d'hôtel* and our ladies'-maids only used to speak to our artificers and tradespeople; and I should have held it as an impossibility that I ever could vex myself about any individuals in that line of life. But let us change the subject: it excites me, and I am ashamed of that."

"Well, tell me whether there 's any news at court: you know I have been away with the young Count de Crécy."

"Ay, ay, I recollect. But tell me, why are you returned alone? Are we to be so lukewarm and negligent in the courtship of one of the queen's maids of honour?"

"Oh, madam, what an idea!" said Souvré. "He travelled night and day, like a madman, when he received his summons to return, and so caught cold. But he will soon recover it. You have, no doubt, already made your arrangements for the wedding of the young couple; might I be admitted into your confidence?"

"Ah, you must always know every thing beforehand," replied the duchess, with a grimace which was intended for a smile. "But it must be allowed that your ideas and opinions are always just and correct, and I take that into consideration."

The marquis bowed, and Madame de Bellefonds continued: "The time will not admit of festivities. You know that Nancy is to be the head-quarters; and we must make our entry with her majesty. Naturally, the count and Mademoiselle de Lesdi-

guières could not, with propriety, travel as part of the same household, and in the same carriage perhaps, without being married. Her majesty has also considered that point, and I have silenced the somewhat contentious Mademoiselle de Lesdiguères. Now it is to be an impromptu. But, as I hear, this most headstrong young lady that ever came under my superintendence has carried her point ; and the queen has requested the archbishop to make over his office to Monsieur de Fénélon—that enthusiastic priest of St. Sulpice. That was done behind my back : the queen was governed by the young lady. However, she had the grace to acquit me of any share in the business. She felt that she had encroached upon my department. However, my good friend, you see we have not much time to spare, and the bridegroom is missing ! Between ourselves, marquis, this young man does not seem to take after his exemplary parents. To be ill just at the time one is to enter upon one's appointment at court, is not shewing exactly the proper respect. Who can say of me that I ever was ill ? But there are strange, new-fangled ideas afloat now ; and since *that* Monsieur Molière breakfasts in the king's ante-chamber, and the king talks to him just as if he were like other people, one can expect nothing else. Formerly our gentlemen had not the extraordinary manners which, in these days, permit a young man of twenty to be sick when he should be doing the duties of an office at court, and is going to be married !"

" You are angry, I perceive, madam," said Souvré ; " I must ~~intercede~~. Your displeasure

will not only make the guilty one unhappy, but also his parents, whom you esteem."

" You are a good creature, marquis,—I know that perfectly. Well, I will shew you that I think you are in the right, by going to speak to Madame de Crécy."

Thereupon she strode up to the maréchale, who was then surrounded by acquaintances; but, at her approach, every one made way, and retreated.

" Madame la Maréchale," said she, " I must just give you one little hint. Their majesties shew the greatest favour to your family, as, indeed, one so high in rank might expect; but young people have not the respectful diffidence of former days, so we must help them to acquire it. Illness is never an excuse for a disregard of the orders of their majesties. But to whom am I saying this? You, my dear, the most accomplished of courtiers—you will understand me, and take your measures accordingly."

" Oh! my dear duchess," replied Madame de Crécy, with her sweetest smile, " who can surpass you in the delicacy of your admonitions? You have a gift of instruction peculiar to yourself. Believe me, I understand you, and the more readily, as you express my own feelings."

\* \* \* \* \*

Lionel accompanied the marshal back to Paris.

Madame de Crécy received them with so much affection, that both fell completely an easy prey into her hands. She invited the marshal to dine with her; and he, put into good-humour by her gracious manner and the company of his children,

consented to do so ; but he was still more touched by her kind attention, when, just as he had called for his first glass of wine, his band of music, which Madame de Crécy abominated, now stationed by her orders in the anteroom, struck up one of his favourite marches.

“ You are really exceedingly obliging, my love,” said he, making that grimace with which we are already acquainted, betokening emotion ; “ I know you are not fond of these merry tunes, and I must return you my thanks.”

“ We have not often the honour of seeing the hero of the Fronde at our table, marshal,” replied his wife, “ and it is right that we should consult his inclinations.”

The old gentleman, unusually pleased, dismissed the band after their first noisy performance, and, having sent his servant to fetch him a purse of gold, he threw upon every plate which was changed for him, and into every glass which he emptied, a couple of *louis d'or* for his wife's servants.

Thus had Madame de Crécy attained her object ; viz. to divert Lionel's thoughts upon his return, and induce him to submit to circumstances which she had disposed with the view of controlling him. This apparently affectionate family party was to please his romantic tastes (as she expressed it), and offer an additional attraction whereby to mitigate the sense of his lost happiness.

When dinner was nearly over, the marshal was informed, that, according to custom, many persons, having heard of his return, had assembled in his antechamber.

“ Oh ! here ! marshal, let them come here !” exclaimed his wife, “ and have everything according to your usual habits.”

The servants soon ushered in some of the most distinguished persons of the court, who used to attend the military levées of the marshal, and had formerly served under him in the army. Lionel was shocked and dismayed to perceive amongst them the Duke de Lesdiguières, who, assuming the privileges of a relation, embraced the marshal and Lionel, and then sank down into a fauteuil, which was dragged forward and placed for him, between the couple which had recently become so conjugal.

“ Well, marshal, having seen your red outriders, I could not deny myself the pleasure of coming to inquire after you myself. And tell me, how goes it with the queen’s new equerry ?” continued he, nodding to Lionel ; “ methinks, this journey was not of long duration. That was duty, count,—zeal for your duty, hey ?”

A loud laugh from the marshal and the witty duke followed this speech, and Lionel, who felt the hopelessness of escape, almost uttered an hysterical scream in his attempt to join in it. His mother even held her breath : the moment was critical. He had submitted sooner than she expected to this new connexion ; but how much depended upon his self-possession ! She saw that his pale hollow cheeks suddenly became red, his heavy eye lighted up, he hastily swallowed his glass of wine, and, turning to the duke, said, in a loud voice, “ Your grace does not disapprove of my zeal, I hope ?”

“ Well, well,” said the duke, “ it is said that

Mademoiselle de Retz could formerly have told of similar zeal on my part. No, no, I have nothing to say against it, if it brings you to announce yourself to Victorine."

Thereupon he drew Lionel to his arms, and hugged and kissed him; and Lionel felt that this business, long settled and universally received, was at that moment ratified. We are unwilling to acknowledge that the recollection of Victorine's youth, beauty, and virtue, rose vividly before his mind, and the sigh which escaped him arose from grief that he was no longer worthy of her.

And Souvré sat laughing and jesting at the same table! Lionel did not yet know the result of his negotiation, and felt that his honour depended on what he might communicate. Souvré knew this perfectly, and he took a malicious pleasure in torturing the maréchale, as well as the youth whom he so bitterly hated and despised; for in vain had his noble confederate sent for him at all hours; he was inaccessible to all her messages, and made his first appearance now, when all inquiries were impossible.

Madame de Crécy had, however, already made up her mind to continue no longer in suspense, and determined to make use even of the facts of which she remained ignorant, to assist the measures which she now felt convinced could not be delayed. She was, therefore, delighted when she saw Lionel driven to the moment of decision, and the resolution with which he met it; for none but herself could understand his forced unnatural manner.

This state of painful excitement was interrupted by the arrival of Monsieur de Dreux and the Mar-

quis de Vieuville. All rose from the table. The Marquis de Vieuville brought the news of a brilliant victory, of the flight of the Duke of Lorraine, and of the queen's intention to set out the day after the next. "Madame de Bellefonds," added he, smiling, and addressing himself to Madame de Crécy, "is informed of the return of the young count. She desires me to inform your grace that the queen will receive all the family of Crécy-Chabanne this evening in full dress."

The maréchale's blood ran cold. But, whatever feelings she might inwardly experience, she was too well practised to betray them.

"Gentlemen," said she, addressing her husband and her son, "her majesty will receive us all this evening. Madame de Bellefonds directs that we come in full dress."

"Faith, then, I shall go!" exclaimed the marshal. "I will see our good, beautiful queen, once more, though I have pretty nearly done with court life."

Taking Souvré aside, the Marquis de Vieuville informed him of the queen's intentions; and he saw, that, if he would not seriously offend Lionel, he must now impart some of his intelligence. He, therefore, took an opportunity to whisper into his ear, "Courage, courage, you are free!"

"Free!" uttered Lionel, turning very pale; and he again repeated "free!" and he felt the full importance of these tidings in his present embarrassing situation. "Has she consented? Oh! Heavens! how did she bear it?"

"By and bye, I will tell you by and bye. No-

thing is so important to you now as your liberty. Therefore be easy, for I can assure you that you are free."

Lionel felt the truth of this. He satisfied himself with it, and rushed along his new course of life with all the mad impetuosity of a man who dares no longer look behind him.

When Madame de Crécy, in full court-dress, and covered with jewels, left her dressing-room to get into the carriage, the Marquis de Souvré stood before her ; and, as his malicious eye fell upon the arrogant woman in all her pride, he rejoiced in the hope of humiliating her.

"Madam," said he, "I can feel no doubt upon what subject it is that you desire to speak with me. You may be easy,—your son is free."

"I supposed as much," said she, coldly. "What could such a person bring forward in support of claims so presumptuous?"

"*That* was not the case, madam," retorted Souvré, sharply. "Her claims were perfectly good : no court of justice in France could have found a flaw in them. And sooner would the king abdicate the crown than she relinquish her rights."

"You are jesting," said the maréchale, somewhat alarmed. "But are we, then, to attribute all to your uncommon cleverness?"

"No ; neither is that it."

"Well, what is it, then ? You said that Lionel was free."

"He is a widower !" replied Souvré, in the most cutting tone, whilst he fixed a piercing look upon his wary ally.

She staggered back a few paces, and appeared to have lost her self-command. "Dead! dead! Marquis, what have you done? The affair ought not to have terminated thus; it is dishonourable to us!"

The marquis cast a glance of indescribable contempt at the haughty and now panic-stricken woman, who sought to maintain, even in crime, her aristocratic dignity. She who, with long and toilsome care, had whetted the dagger which was to destroy her victim, and had so lulled her conscience that she hoped never to feel remorse, now thought her honour tarnished, and experienced the fate common to every villain who sees blood flowing from the wound he has inflicted.

"Madam," said he, raising his voice, "I must entreat that you will compose yourself, and not use offensive expressions. All that took place was but the necessary result of the conditions which Lionel and I were obliged, according to your own instructions, to impose upon her. The young Countess de Crécy"—

"Stop! stop! not that name! I will not bear it!" cried she, beside herself.

"And yet, madam, she had an undoubted right to it: however, as you will. The young woman, then, had but recently got over her confinement: she was, therefore, delicate, and, I must add, beautiful as an angel. Moreover, she was innocent and guileless as an infant, and knew perfectly well that she was lawfully married. She could not, therefore, hear your disgraceful and degrading terms, conveyed by me, without the most violent

shock ; and when Lionel took flight, and she witnessed his departure, at that moment I saw her die before my eyes."

" Die ! die !—such a plebeian girl—to die !" said she, feebly, and, tottering to a chair, fell into it, too giddy to stand.

The marquis watched her without stirring ; he would not attempt to alleviate the blow ; perhaps, too, he could not ; for, although he kept his end in view, he could not shake off a feeling of horror which came over him every time he recollects the look of Flora, and thought of the judgment which she had called down upon him. It was only outwardly that he was self-possessed and unmoved ; inwardly he was continually haunted by this feeling. After what he considered a sufficiently long pause, he proceeded : " However, Lionel knows nothing of this. I told him that he was free, but not by what means. Vieuville communicated to me that the queen intends his marriage should take place this evening ; and this news would have discomposed him, for he is quite incapable of controlling himself."

" Yes, indeed," sighed the maréchale ; " he must not hear it ; it would break his heart."

Souvré was amazed at the mood in which he saw Madame de Crécy. " She is absurdly discomposed," he said to himself. He thought her tiresome—contemptible. " I begin to fear, madam, that you regret what has happened, although it was your will," said he, in the hope of provoking her. " And I can bear witness that the deceased wife of your son was worthy of extraordinary ad-

miration. Had you seen her, perhaps you would have been willing to acknowledge her rights yourself."

This was a good stroke. She stood up, though with some difficulty, and said : " Marquis, compassion will never lead me to a breach of my duty as a mother, or of that which I owe to the two equally illustrious names I bear. It is enough. Thus must the end be. And may it prove a warning to all foolish girls, in an inferior station, not to obtrude themselves into a higher class. Their lot must, according to right, be always the same."

" Now, that delights me, madam," said Souvré, sneeringly ; " now you are yourself again."

" You are vastly liberal of your approbation, sir," replied she, evidently offended by his familiarity. " I was not seeking to obtain it. My age, as well as my station, ought to shield me from such expressions."

" It is only one who, like myself, has had an insight into your secret machinations, that can have the right to use them," said Souvré, carelessly.

" I have no time to talk with you. We must go to the queen," replied Madame de Crécy. But the passion which now inflamed her blood destroyed every newly awakened feeling of tenderness ; and the image of her victim, whom Souvré had extolled so provokingly, was now driven from her mind. Her thoughts flew eagerly to the scene, which she could now enter upon with increased security, and where she promised herself at length to witness the success of her projects. These thoughts

were somewhat checked when she met the marshal and Lionel at the steps of the great entrance, where the carriages were drawn up. Lionel looked like a spectre in his brilliant court-dress ; his countenance bore an expression of death-like apathy.

## CHAPTER V.

THE guests were assembled in the inner apartments of Queen Maria Theresa. The small parties, as Souvré had said, always consisted of some hundreds of persons ; and, on this day, everybody who had the slightest claim to an invitation, strove to obtain one ; for, though it had not been given out, a general expectation prevailed that something more than common was to take place. It was observed with surprise that the Abbé Fénélon was there, and that he was uncommonly pale, and kept aloof. Inquiries were made, conclusions drawn, and the truth was at length pretty nearly divined, during the interval of time in which the arrival of the queens was impatiently awaited. The desired moment came at last. With a manner full of respect and affection to each other, they both appeared, the young queen leaning on the arm of her stately mother-in-law. The princesses of the blood followed them ; then came the officers of the household and ladies in waiting. Mademoiselle Lesdiguières was not amongst them, which was instantly remarked by all present.

The two queens and their suite made their progress through the saloon, and distinguished the families of Crécy and Lesdiguières by the particular friendliness of their manner.

In the meantime the Marquis de Vieuville drew Lionel aside ; both left the saloon, and the marquis led Lionel, by a circuitous way, to the queen's closet. As he entered, he immediately perceived the beautiful form of Mademoiselle de Lédiguières, who, dressed in silver tissue, and adorned with jewels, was seated in the middle of the room, her eyes fixed upon the door, through which Lionel and the Marquis de Vieuville now entered.

“ Victorine !” exclaimed Lionel, the sight of her at once disclosing to him the meaning of the secret which had pursued him the whole evening. “ Victorine, my bride ! my beloved !”

He threw himself at her feet with an impetuosity, which was, however, rather the result of excited nerves than of deep feelings.

Victorine’s emotion was excessive when she saw him kneeling before her. She was already deeply affected by the solemnity of the moment, and tear upon tear fell from her beautiful eyes on Lionel’s head, which he had buried in her hands.

“ Lionel,” said she, tenderly, “ I am yours with the fullest approbation of my reason, and the warmest affection of my heart ; and the queen wishes that you should hear from myself that I am ready to prove it to you.”

“ Oh ! Victorine !” cried Lionel, “ I am not worthy to be your husband. Consider what you do. I am not worthy of you. You are an angel ! I am a poor, weak, miserable man.”

As he raised his head in violent emotion, Victorine perceived the deadly paleness and haggard features of his handsome face ; and although the

world might set her down as cold and heartless, she had all the feelings of a woman. Her first impulse, therefore, at the sight of his suffering was the tenderest compassion; the second, the generous courage to shew him this feeling, and to soothe him with all the tenderness of female devotion.

“Lionel,” said she, affectionately, “you are ill; your looks betray it. Cease to condemn yourself. If you are suffering, take your Victorine to support and comfort you. I feel strength within me to do both.”

“Oh! dearest love, is it true?” cried Lionel. “Dare I still hope to attain such earthly happiness? Is it possible that Victorine can be willing to be mine?”

“Enthusiast,” she answered, with a smile; “let this prove to you whether I am willing to be yours. The queen’s chapel is lighted; Fénelon awaits us at the altar. The queen desired that I should communicate this surprise to you.”

Lionel answered by a cry; his head sank upon her lap. The noble, tender girl hung over him with all the rapture of a female heart, for she believed that she was loved.

“I have settled it all quite right then, have I?” said a gentle voice. Both arose at the sound of the well-known accents. Maria Theresa and Anne of Austria had entered unperceived, and stood before the pair agitated by emotions so widely different.

Victorine sank on one knee before the queen; Lionel mechanically did the same. Both queens appeared affected, and cordially bestowed their blessing.

The room was fast filling. Henrietta of England embraced Victorine, and made her sit down. The folding-doors were thrown open to the apartments now filled with company, and the object of the fête was disclosed.

The queen took from the hand of the Duchess of Bellefonds a tiara of diamonds, which she attempted to place on the head of the bride. The beautiful hands of Madame achieved this, adding to it the bridal wreath of orange-flowers. Queen Anne detached from her bosom a diamond sprig, with which Madame de Bellefonds decorated the bride.

Victorine again knelt and kissed the hands of the affectionate princesses; then rising, she presented to the whole assembly the lovely image of a noble and modest bride.

Monsieur de Dreux now conducted the half-unconscious Lionel to the queen. The Marquis de Vieuville handed to her the ribbon of the order of the Saint Esprit. "The king wishes you joy, Count Crécy," said the queen, "and sends you this message, 'That the virtues of a true knight may be exercised apart from the profession of arms, they ought to be first devoted to the protection of women.'"

Lionel trembled as Vieuville almost forced him down to the ground, and passed the blue ribbon over his shoulder. He had already dishonoured it by the foulest deed of iniquity against female innocence and virtue. The light silk ribbon felt like a band of fire encircling his breast.

He could not utter a sound; he had scarcely strength to rise. But nobody saw his condition;

his probable feelings were too readily imagined, for his real ones to be remarked.

A message was now brought to the queen, to which she replied by an inclination of the head, then beckoned Lionel and Victorine to her side, and placed them conspicuously before the assembled court, whilst the Marquis de Vieuville, advancing, proclaimed in a loud voice, “ Her majesty the queen invites this assembly to attend in the royal chapel the solemnisation of the marriage-ceremony between Lionel Count de Crécy-Chabanne and Victorine Princesse de Lesdiguières.”

The officers of the household stepped forward ; and Maria Theresa, smiling graciously, and holding her by the hand, led Mademoiselle de Lesdiguières into the adjoining chapel ; whilst Anne of Austria, leaning upon the arm of Lionel, followed, all present crowding after them, preceded by Henrietta of England, who walked between the parents of the two parties.

Like an apparition from a higher world, a saint-like expression illuminating his pale countenance, Fénélon stood upon the steps of the altar, awaiting the bridal pair. His eye rested an instant on them both ; then he seemed to be wrapt in heavenly contemplations.

His voice was strangely affected, and had so sepulchral a sound that Victorine hardly recognised it. It became gradually stronger, till it regained its full melodious tones : at length, turning to the bride, he said, “ Victorine de Lesdiguières, let me warn you to behold in your superior privileges only the higher responsibilities which God has imposed

upon you. To Him you must account, not for what befalls you, but for the spirit in which you endure your trials. Where much is given, much will be required. Upon you he has bestowed rich gifts, and from you he will expect an example of Christian excellence. Do not deceive us," said he, stooping down to her, and his voice trembled with emotion. " You are a bright hope in the path of all those who have known you, and—loved you," added he, scarcely audibly. After a pause, he went through the service of the church—and they were married.

The queen and princesses, after wishing them joy, withdrew for a few minutes to allow room to the new relations of both families, and all the courtiers, to offer their congratulations. Later, there was a performance of sacred music in the apartments of Queen Anne, at which the newly-married couple were present, seated between the two queens. The next day the court broke up. The young Countess de Crécy, by the side of her husband, in a coach with two of the queen's ladies and two equerries, followed the triumphal procession of this warlike party of pleasure to Nancy, the chief seat of the brilliant head-quarters.

## CHAPTER VI.

It is the province of history to record the events of the two campaigns in Holland. Suffice it to us to say, that, although the treaty of Nimeguen was not concluded till seven years after the close of this campaign, Louis XIV., whose personal presence with the army had mainly contributed to accomplish the designs he had in view, returned to Versailles covered with laurels, and more than ever the idol of his people. He was followed in his triumphal progress by all that portion of his court which did not take an active part in the war; and, amongst these, Lionel and his wife held a prominent place.

The death of Flora was the wedding-present which the Marquis de Souvré had made Lionel on the day of his marriage. But the mask which he had learned to assume, that he might not terrify the ever-smiling court, concealed his despair, and the remorse which gnawed his conscience. For the marquis did not choose to give him to understand, as Madame de Crécy wished, that the supposed death of Flora was the consequence of her recent confinement. To miss the moment of revenge, for which he had so long and so sedulously laboured, would have been a piece of sheer folly: he crushed Lionel with the whole weight of the

news, which did, indeed, make him as miserable as he could have hoped, and rendered all his rich possessions valueless, at the very moment they were heaped most lavishly upon him.

Victorine was all in all to him. Formerly shy, proud, and reserved, she was now the most tender and devoted wife. She was too keen-sighted not to perceive the state of mental and physical suffering of her husband, though unconscious of the cause, and devoted herself to him with all the affectionate assiduity of her ardent love. How could he withstand the combined charm of so much loveliness and affection ! He gave himself up to the enjoyment of it with soft dreamy tenderness so long as his weak heart enabled him to avert his eyes from his real fate ; but he did not reward her confiding love with kindred confidence, and found only a delusive shelter in the calm of the present moment.

The physician of St. Roche was, through Souvré's hands, provided with abundant means for the maintenance of the child and its attendant. The corpse of Flora was ordered to be interred in the old chapel of the castle, in the vault of Claude of Brittany, and Lionel had been made acquainted with these circumstances previous to his journey with the court. He had already learned to regard these worldly duties as paramount ; and found in them an excuse for himself, as they necessarily removed him from those imposed upon him elsewhere, and opened to him that refuge of all weak characters—procrastination.

He was now returned—the old rooms received

him again. The Hôtel de Crécy was made over to the young heir. His high rank and connexions—his place at court—the beauty and refinement of Victorine, which adorned and enlivened those once dull and deserted rooms, and which seemed to shed a reflected lustre over himself, at times deceiving him; the duty of making her happy, which became daily a more engaging occupation;—all these things combined to carry Lionel through the winter without his bestowing any serious thoughts upon those events which, but half known to him, and of slight concern to others, demanded his most serious attention.

The spring again brought its ceaseless round of fêtes, disposed for the display and enjoyment of the beautiful gardens which connected one royal palace with another; and at length Victorine required his exclusive attention, for, in the flowery month of May, she presented to him, as she believed, his first-born son.

The fearful state of his heart may be comprehended, when we state that, after the first impulse, it kindled not towards this child. He stood mute before it—a condemned criminal! It was just such another little creature that he had rejected: it had the same claims upon him: but the joy which he had experienced at the birth of Flora's son, he had repaid by the blackest treachery; and vengeance had now overtaken him, and left him to despair, depriving him of the natural feelings of humanity.

On the other hand, the birth of an heir placed the maréchale and her husband on the pinnacle of

happiness, and they were both, in their different ways, softened by it. The infant itself, and Victorine, who had brought this joy, were to them objects of almost doting affection—even surpassing that of her own parents.

The whole family was at Paris. The young countess was confined at the Hôtel de Soubise; the happy event was announced with pride and exultation; princely largesses were distributed in all directions; and, finally, the christening fête was arranged on a corresponding scale of grandeur.

Lionel suffered himself to be driven passively along what seemed to be his destined course, no one entertaining any doubts as to what his wishes must be. But he had become more irritable than formerly; the stings of his conscience were awakened; he became restless and oppressed—he could not breathe freely—his looks were dark and gloomy—he sought solitude; and any one who had seen him, shut up in his own room, standing erect and motionless, his eye roaming on vacancy, must have feared that this happy father, and favourite of fortune, had lost his reason. But it was, perhaps, the vision which appeared to him during these hours that preserved it. He was thinking of Flora. A thin cloud seemed to rise in the darkness of the room—it hovered nearer—and in soft, and scarcely discernible outline, assumed the form of Flora: first, she moved her slender white hand; then he perceived her small and delicate foot: her pale and lovely face next appeared to him, her cheeks bedewed with tears, but the sweetest smile of love on her beautiful lips; her rich tresses re-

sembled streams of gold, and her eyes appealed to him so imploringly, that he stretched out his arms to clasp her ; his faltering tongue strove to articulate her name, and when at last she vanished, he fell to the ground, and a gush of tears relieved him. This recurred daily, in Lionel's solitude, and alone enabled him to struggle through the day.

Their majesties had shewn a most flattering interest in the happy event which had taken place in a family so distinguished by their favour ; and Madame de Crécy nourished a secret hope, which made her a patient listener, whilst the Duchesse de Lesdignières contended with the marshal who should be the god-fathers and god-mothers of the child.

It was after dinner on the third day after the birth of the child, (the day following having been fixed for the christening, though amongst the numerous noble guests the sponsors had not yet been selected) that Lionel, when about to enter the house on his return from the king, was accosted by a boy, who gave him a note written in pencil. He looked at the little messenger in an absent manner, and, taking him for a beggar, gave him some money, and hastened up the steps.

To reach his wife's apartments he had to ascend the staircase, and through many galleries and rooms, to make his way through a crowd of servants, tradesmen, and artificers, all too busily employed in the preparations for the fête of the day following to observe or recognise Lionel. But when he reached the last room, he stood horror-stricken to see that they were placing under a ca-

nopy Victorine's state-bed, which was surrounded by a moveable glass screen in a gilt frame, to separate her from the sponsors and those near relations who were privileged to make their bow to her.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lionel; "is this odious ceremony perfectly indispensable? How dangerous to expose the mother to such a risk! It might cost her her life. This is intolerable!"

He put his hand to his face; at that moment it seemed to him the chamber of death—the bed a *catafalque*. "O God! how dreadful!" he exclaimed, with wild despair, and rushing against the amazed domestics, in his impatience to reach Victorine and the comfort her countenance never failed to afford him. But he was met by some of her attendants, who made a sign to him to move quietly. Victorine was asleep. He approached gently, and sat down close by the bed-side. Gradually her form emerged from the twilight. With what emotion did he gaze upon the beautiful regular features, which, even under the dominion of sleep, preserved their classical character.

Sigh after sigh heaved his breast; the stillness of the room and the immovable sleep of Victorine weighed painfully on his heart. He could endure it no longer, but, gliding quietly away, he drew a long breath in the first vacant room he reached.

When, some hours later, he entered the drawing-room, where his family were sitting, the marshal said to him, "Lionel, we must now decide who are to be the sponsors of your child."

"The sponsors of my child?" answered Lionel, with a look of abstraction: "the king and queen."

“ I expected it ! ” exclaimed the maréchale, as she unconsciously rose from her seat, and an expression of unbounded delight diffused itself over her countenance.

The marshal also stood up, and making a slight stiff bow, said : “ I have no reason to complain that their majesties forget the old Marshal de Crécy-Chabanne.”

“ But now tell us how it all came about,” said Madame de Lesdiguières. “ I like to hear what they do and say upon such occasions. My brother, the Cardinal de Retz, used always to say, ‘ Let them do what they will, and try as they may to make themselves understood by some unusual method, they will find at last they must do as other men do ; they must make use of the same words, and open their lips, and breathe to articulate them, as nature dictates.’ ” She accompanied this speech, so heretical to the ears of the Crécy, with a hearty laugh, and looked around for Lionel, who had stepped out upon the balcony with Louise, where the cool evening breeze refreshed his burning forehead.

“ Well, son-in-law, are we not to hear how it happened ? ” she cried, in so shrill a voice that even Lionel was aroused by it.

With a dejected countenance, he approached her, and asked in a serious tone what she desired of him.

“ Lionel,” said his mother, sternly, being provoked by his careless manner, “ you seem to forget what is due in your outward conduct to us, and to the high honour conferred upon our family by their majesties.”

His mother's voice had always an influence over him : it swept like a cold blast of wind through all the recesses of his heart.

" It is true, I must have appeared very indifferent, and I have to entreat your pardon ; but the idea of to-morrow fills me with anxiety. Victorine will, by the prescribed forms of etiquette, be exposed to a trial which appears to me to be fraught with danger to her life."

" Sir," said the maréchale, coldly, " women of rank have been subject to this etiquette ever since I can remember, and I never heard of any result which can justify this extraordinary alarm on your part. Now, have the goodness to tell the duchess how their majesties made known their gracious intention."

" Yesterday evening," Lionel began ; he would have proceeded, but three voices, at the same time, interrupted him.

" Yesterday evening ! Did you know it yesterday evening ? Oh, heavens ! what an unpardonable omission !" cried the maréchale. " We ought already to have waited upon all the royal family."

The duchess went into fits of laughter. " No," said she, in the intervals, " none but Victorine's husband could make such a wonderful blunder as that—herself excepted, perhaps. But I think she will make herself ill with laughing when I tell her of it."

The marshal did not know exactly what line to adopt. He was ready enough to laugh, when he saw the old duchess laughing so heartily ; and yet

it seemed to him an unheard-of proceeding on the part of his son.

“The king forbad any public celebration of this event on the part of the family,” said Lionel, and addressed himself to his mother, who could scarcely control her rage.

“When the queen dismissed us, yesterday evening, she chose me to wish ‘Good night’ in her name to his majesty. She inquired after Victorine, and told me that the king had something to say to me. We assembled as usual in the banqueting-room, where the king supped *en petit couvert*. After supper, the king leant against the chimney-piece, and we were allowed to address him; but, as I kept in the background, he called me forward. He was very gracious, and also made kind inquiries after Victorine. Now came the moment for our dismissal, and the moment of competition. You know to what I allude. The king took his little golden candlestick; every one pressed forward,—each hoped to obtain it. The king named me, and I received the candlestick, and was allowed to follow him to the *petit coucher*. The queens, the princes and princesses, and the king’s old nurse, were here assembled. The king, at whose side it was my duty to remain, as I had the honour of carrying the light, went up to the queen, and said to her: ‘Will you stand sponsor with me for the Count de Crécy-Chabanne’s child?’ The queen smiled, and made a sign of assent, and I bent the knee to both. But the king called out, ‘No, no; never with the gold candlestick.’ I stood up again, and the king, according to an ancient custom, presented to the

queen, as his co-sponsor, a nosegay and a pair of gloves. But the nosegay was of precious stones, the gloves beautifully embroidered in pearls. Whoever has carried the gold candle in the evening is obliged to appear at the private levée the next morning. There Monsieur informed me that he and Madame would attend the christening in person as proxies for their majesties."

Madame de Crécy rang the bell, and ordered that the state carriages should come round; and they all dispersed to make their *toilette*, to wait upon Madame Henriette and the Duke of Orleans.

The bustle and noise of that day was succeeded by a morning of solemn stillness, the preparations for the great festivities being completed. The magnificence of the illustrious family of Crécy-Chabanne and Soubise shone forth in all its splendour. A description of the decorations of the palace would be a complete illustration of the wealth, pride, and cumbrous taste of the period. Some groups of servants moved quietly about early in the morning, giving the last finishing touches; and gardeners watered the costly plants which transformed some of the rooms into fairy-land.

The chapel, in which De Noailles, the Archbishop of Paris, was to perform the baptismal service, was connected with the other apartments by a temporary gallery hung with rich drapery, and the blaze of light which filled the chapel, and cast its full radiance on the altar, was the more striking from the contrasted light of the summer's evening.

Not a wish of the maréchale's now remained unfulfilled. She could not but acknowledge, high as

her pretensions were, that, except the queen's court, a more brilliant assembly could not be seen; and, what was of no small consideration with her, she felt herself the centre of attraction. But, however well satisfied she was with her place of honour, she could ill endure Lionel's unpunctuality, which she attributed to his habitual, dreamy carelessness; for he, who ought to have been receiving his guests, had not yet appeared,—indeed, he was not to be found in the palace, as his servant brought word. His full-dress clothes were lying in his dressing-room ready for him, and he had been seen an hour before in the apartment of his wife; but now he had vanished. The marshal was compelled by this circumstance to take his son's place in the first room, where he was surrounded by all the most distinguished gentlemen present, the arrival of their royal highnesses being every moment expected. Servants were sent in every direction, but all returned with the same tidings: the young count could nowhere be found.

It required the utmost exertion of the maréchale's self-command to conceal the tortures of her mind. At first her feelings were only those of excessive anger and indignation; but gradually the apprehension of some great misfortune took possession of her; and as this became more and more probable, the triumph of her proud heart began to abate. The dreaded moment drew near: the Duke of Orleans' equerries arrived; their royal highnesses followed closely; and the heir of the house—he who ought to have been at the

threshold of the palace to receive them—was not to be found! Madame de Crécy felt a faint sickness come over her, which she had not recovered, when she received a message from the marshal to say that he was coming down. She moved on mechanically, and had scarcely reached her appointed place, when the carriages of their royal highnesses drove under the portico.

In a state of almost desperation she looked round for her son: he was nowhere to be seen. Habit quickly restored her self-possession. The brilliant suite, at the head of which appeared the lovely Henrietta of England, by the side of her husband, the Duke of Orleans, acted like a charm upon her. A mind so well schooled in all the forms of the court could feel nothing but rapture at honour so distinguished.

“Madam,” said the Duke of Orleans, “his majesty has signified to us that we may presume to offer ourselves as proxies for their august persons upon this occasion. May we hope for your acquiescence?”

The maréchale curtsied to the ground to both, and kissed the hem of Madame’s gown, who embraced her kindly. “His majesty knows how to magnify his favours, by the way in which he confers them; and the heart of the receiver is almost overwhelmed by the greatness of the honour.”

“Oh,” said Madame, laughing good-humouredly, “I am delighted to have an opportunity of seeing the Hôtel Soubise, of the magnificence of which I have heard so much.”

"And to-day, Madame," replied the maréchale, "it seems to me that we possess nothing worthy of such an occasion."

"Of that we will judge for ourselves," said the lovely princess; and walked on between the rows of assembled guests into the splendid suite of rooms, which fully realised her expectations.

Their royal highnesses had taken their place under the canopy, and several persons were called up to them, to whom they addressed some usual civilities. Placed by the side of Madame, the maréchale was obliged to retain her composure, although, now that she was stationary, her agonising thoughts returned in full force. She expected every moment some inquiry from the princess in reference to this mysterious absence; or—a certain consequence of such offensive negligence—the censure of the assembled company. Souvré too, whom she had last despatched, had not returned.

It was contrary to etiquette that the ceremony of the christening should be delayed after the arrival of the royal guests. They could not be considered as having any view in mixing in the society assembled there, which would be an act of too great condescension, but were to be regarded solely as the king's representatives. And this Madame de Crécy knew, to her inexpressible misery, better than any one present: but how could she give the signal to move, while the father of the child was absent?

Madame now ceased her salutations. However free from pride, still a look of surprise and expecta-

tion was perceptible on her countenance. The maréchale wiped the drops of cold perspiration from her brow: she saw the stern look of Madame de Bellefonds, and the impatient movement of her white wand. Some decisive step must be taken.

The Duke of Orleans had just ended his conversation with the marshal. His eye glanced round with a significant expression, which seemed to authorise the commencement of the ceremony. Madame de Crécy felt that every person in the room must be amazed by so extraordinary an absence, and that her reputation must suffer. Her pride so cruelly wounded drove her almost to frenzy,—the forms seemed to swim round her; but still she could see that the Duchesse de Bellefonds had risen, and was coming to her across the vacant space in front of the princess's seat. Despair gave her strength: she turned to the duchess, and requested her to give the signal for the departure.

Henrietta immediately arose; for she too had seen the stately approach of the punctilious mistress of the robes, and, like the rest of the court, felt a secret pleasure in thwarting her projects.

“Are we to set out without your son—without the father—my dear Madame de Crécy?” said she, softly, to the trembling mother.

The answer she received was so confused and ambiguous that she did not comprehend it; and she supposed that the young count awaited them at the entrance of the chapel.

The guests now arranged themselves according

to their precedence, and all moved on in due order of procession towards the chapel. The maréchale still cherished a hope that here she might find her son ; but here he was not.

The service began. Louis Marie de Crécy-Chabanne was christened by those names : the Duke de Lesdiguières and the marshal replaced the father.

The service was concluded. Madame de Crécy, with a tottering step, went up to the Duchess of Orleans. Madame could not overlook the affront, as she stood there in the name of the queen. She greeted her coldly—neither wished her joy nor embraced her.

“ May I venture to inquire,” said the Duke of Orleans, addressing the agonised parents, who were standing together, “ to what cause we are to attribute the slight which appears to us to be cast upon the honour my royal brother intended to confer upon the parents of the infant, by the absence of its father ? Where is the young Count de Crécy-Chabanne ? ”

“ Heaven only knows ! ” exclaimed the marshal, in a tone of despair, and he wrung his hands, and clasped them with violence against his forehead ; “ I hope in his grave, or else I shall not survive this.”

The maréchale was ready to drop. She had already framed an excuse in her mind—a dangerous illness was to be the pretext used to save him ; but now that was overthrown. Her wonted presence of mind forsook her ; she turned aside to breathe freely. The Marquis de Souvré had glided in and

stood at her side. He said to her, in a low voice, "Madam, give up all hopes of Lionel. His first wife is living, and he has fled to St. Roche."

A piercing cry was heard, and the Maréchale de Crécy-Chabanne, who had never before betrayed the slightest symptom of weakness in the presence of the court, lay senseless on the ground.

"May I presume to remind your royal highness that this is no longer a fitting scene for your presence," said the inexorable Duchess de Bellefonds; and the Countess de Grammont also making a deep curtsey, and directing a look of inquiry to Madame: the good-natured princess checked the feeling of compassion to which she was always easily excited, and looked at her husband.

Monsieur's countenance shewed displeasure. "We appear to have come here to witness a very extraordinary family scene," said he, giving his arm to his wife, and bowing slightly to the surrounding guests: his equerries, in the meantime, having called up the carriage, he hurried away; and so, before the maréchale had come to herself again, their royal highnesses had quitted the Hôtel de Soubise.

When she re-opened her eyes, she found herself in an arm-chair in the chapel, her maids and the doctor around her; but foremost was the good-humoured old Duchesse de Lesdiguières, who, notwithstanding her stiff brocaded gown and load of jewels, was kneeling and rubbing her hands, whilst the marshal and the duke looked on in silence. "Cheer up, my dear," said she, good-naturedly; when she perceived the first symptoms of returning

life ; “ it will all be explained. Only cheer up ! His retreat must soon be discovered.”

But where could the maréchale seek for comfort ? She saw—what none of those who were occupied in attending her had yet perceived—the hôtel was empty. All had flown from the place where an insult had apparently been offered to the representatives of the king’s majesty. To have remained, would have been to participate in the offence. With the first dawn of returning consciousness, Madame de Crécy was aware of this ; but she could not be sensible of her downfall from the highest pinnacle of honour and distinction to disgrace, without experiencing a dangerous shock. The physician pronounced it to be necessary to open a vein : the footmen took up the fauteuil in which she reclined, and carried her through the whole suite of rooms, of which the splendour only aggravated her misery—through the great banqueting-room, where all was still laid out in preparation—to her distant sleeping apartment, where bleeding at length relieved the oppression under which she laboured, and a few drops of opium having been administered, she sank into a profound sleep.

## CHAPTER VII.

LIONEL had passed the day, which was to have been one of so much honour and distinction to him, in a state of mind which is perhaps experienced by none but the condemned criminal before his execution. He had remained as long as possible in Victorine's room : her frank and cheerful disposition kept up his spirits. As soon as he was obliged to leave her, he relapsed into that state of despair against which he struggled in vain. A feeling of terror crept over him as he thought of the vision which so regularly returned ; he longed for it, and dreaded it at the same time.

He had not long to wait for it. It seemed to him as if it hovered and whispered close to him. He rushed to his own solitary chamber. Almost in a state of distraction, he cried out, " Flora, Flora, I am going to give to another child that station and those rights of which I have deprived yours — my legitimate first-born ! Must not I atone for it with my death ? must not this black sin be avenged ? Alas ! upon myself, or upon

the innocent child who occupies the place of the other?"

His excitement had attained the highest pitch ; he was half kneeling—he was sure she was there, that she would appear to him—his eyes sought her—how could it be that he did not see her ? One moment only, and her pale beautiful face appeared covered with tears—that sweet forgiving smile upon her lips ; then he saw her hand, she beckoned to him ; then all had vanished, and Lionel could weep.

How long he remained thus, in an almost senseless state, we do not know. When he rose up again he was startled by his own appearance, and felt he could not shew himself in such a condition. Slowly he descended a little staircase which led to the garden. The beautiful aspect of nature affected him ; the first fresh verdure of the young leaves shone brightly amongst the dark stems and branches ; the air was damp and warm—a genial atmosphere for the opening of the still-closed buds, but too close and heavy for the free respiration of man. It but added to Lionel's feeling of oppression. Sighing deeply, his head sunk upon his breast, he walked on mechanically, when he fancied he heard a voice : he looked round, a boy was running after him : he stopped, and then recognised him as the same to whom he had given alms the day before.

“ What do you want, boy ? ” said he, and drew from his pocket some silver ; “ are you not satisfied with what I gave you ? ”

“ Oh, what good will your money do me ? ” said the child, who now stood before him quite out of breath ; “ only read what I brought you, and say whether you will go with me.”

“ What do you mean, my boy ? I have not received anything. Take this money : I cannot go with you now.”

“ Oh dear ! ” said the lad, almost crying, “ I am sure I gave you the note yesterday into your own hand. What have you done with it ? They will think I lost it, and that you won’t come with me because you did not get the note.”

Lionel now recollects, that, distracted as his mind was at that time, he had not read the note that was given to him ; but, supposing it to be a petition, he had given money without looking at it. He searched the pockets of his coat, which was the same he had worn the day before, and found no note. “ My child,” said he, “ I have lost the petition ; but I will give you what you need without it. I cannot go with you, for my presence here is necessary.”

“ Oh ! God have mercy upon him ! ” ejaculated the boy, crying now outright ; “ then the poor gentleman must die without you. It’s not right to

refuse a dying man anything, and he cannot and will not die without seeing you!"

"A dying man!" said Lionel, in alarm, "who do you mean? Who wants to speak to me?"

"Why, who but Lesueur, to be sure?" said the boy. "He lies dying, and has done so for two days. It may be all over with him any moment; but he says he cannot die till you have been to him, else that you must perish in your ignorance."

"Gracious heaven! What do you say?" exclaimed Lionel. "Lesueur dying! Where—oh! where is he?"

"At home, sir," said the child, still crying; "and if you did but hear how he calls you! He cannot pray now with the good priest who is with him night and day, because he is always calling for you, and thinks you will never be happy if you do not hear his secret."

"Lesueur! Lesueur!" sighed Lionel, whilst the thoughts thus recalled almost overcame him, "what can you have to say to me? Oh! he who was once staying with her. I must go to him—I must see him. Do you know the way? If so, shew it to me."

"Oh! thank you, sir," said the boy, quickly drying up his tears. "If you will only follow me, I know the way."

Lionel in haste unclosed a little door which opened into the stable-yard; he called his coach-

man, and desired him to follow him with a plain carriage without liveries as quickly as possible. "Where to?" he asked the boy.

"To St. Sulpice, to the seminary adjoining the monastery," answered the boy, and they both hurried away.

The Quartier St. Sulpice was the most remote and indigent part of Paris. Fields and gardens intervened between the poor and scattered dwellings. In the more immediate vicinity of the college were a few streets in which the richer inhabitants dwelt; but even these were thronged with tradespeople and artificers of an inferior class; and swarms of begging children, the usual accompaniment of poverty, gave a dismal aspect to the whole district. It was evident that here the sole struggle was for the attainment of the common necessities of life. The college and the monks of St. Sulpice were the principal proprietors; and, as far as it was possible, in accordance with the strict rules of the order, they relieved the temporal wants of those around them. Still greater were the benefits afforded by their spiritual cares. Their judicious aids and earnest exhortations prevented this, the most wretched part of the metropolis, from being also the most dangerous; for the fear of the vigilance of these good and holy men served as a check to the depravity which it was not in their power entirely to eradicate.

Lionel had probably hardly any knowledge of the existence of this part of Paris ; at least, it seemed to him, as he followed the active boy at a quick pace, and in a state of feverish excitement, like some foreign town. The little which his perturbed state allowed him to notice was completely strange to him.

“ That good gentleman, M. Lesueur, has been nursed here a long time,” said the boy, after a silence. “ When he came, everybody thought he was dying. But the kind gentlemen nursed him so well, that he has been able to finish his St. Theresa. However, we often thought that he would expire over his work. Ay, sir,” he proceeded, “ he is very good ; there’s no one that don’t love him ; for he is as gentle and pious as a saint. And so you ought to come, that you may relieve his mind of its last earthly care.”

Lionel sighed deeply, for his fears and forebodings weighed heavily upon him.

The boy informed him that he was the son of the porter, and used to grind Lesueur’s colours. Making some short cuts through narrow alleys, which could be known to none but inhabitants of the place, they followed a long wall, above which the tops of high trees seemed to indicate the vicinity of some more considerable abode. The boy stopped at a grated door, and rang a bell, and they entered an avenue, at the end of which they beheld the

seminary of St. Sulpice. On both sides lay the extensive gardens belonging to the monastery, which, with the church, was seen through the trees to the left. Lionel breathed more freely. This stillness and retirement seemed to produce a soothing effect upon him. He raised his head, and looked around him : he could see the dark figures of the monks moving amongst the trees, and he could distinguish a body of choristers chaunting, which they seemed to be following. The boy stood still, then, exclaiming suddenly, "Ah ! there they come !" he fell upon his knees. "They are going towards the college—he is about to receive extreme unction—they are carrying the Host."

Lionel looked round, and he also saw the procession of monks advancing along another avenue, which seemed to lead to the left wing of the college. He was much affected : he felt that there was still redemption, still forgiveness, for the sins of men. His agitated and desponding soul found rest. A voice from amidst the choristers seemed to address these words to him : "The peace of God to the penitent !" He would gladly have hid his face in the carpet of green moss which spread itself under the old trees, and have lain there until time and reflection should point out to him the way to make his peace with God; but resisting his inclination from anxiety not to delay the fulfilment of Lesueur's last desire, alarm at the magnitude

of his guilt again took possession of him, and filled him with terror; and as he staggered on, he could only look upon himself as a lost sinner.

The seminary was a large and stately palace. Its architecture and gardens were of the date of Catherine of Medicis, and, although the Guises were said to have been the proprietors, it was believed to have been built by the queen, and with a view to some special and secret purposes. At all events, it was constructed on a princely scale, and with so many secret contrivances, that it was obvious other objects were contemplated than those required for the use and the splendour of a large establishment. Those fine and well-preserved rooms were now the abode of the truest piety, zeal, and learning, which had applied the extensive buildings to far nobler ends.

Just as Lionel and his little guide were approaching the porch of the seminary, the procession of monks vanished within it, and Lionel hastened on before the boy. The magnificent portico was filled by the choristers: they knelt to the Host as it passed.

The abbot, concluding that the stranger whom he saw was the expected Count de Crécy, would have addressed him; but Lionel, intent only upon joining the procession, looked anxiously around, and, without noticing the salutation of the worthy

abbot, hurried on after the monks, expecting by so doing to reach his destination.

No one obstructed him, and he reached simultaneously with them a large room, which was evidently the studio of Lesueur; for in the middle of it, elevated upon an easel, decked with flowers, and in a beautifully carved frame, was a picture, which, though the back was turned to him, Lionel guessed to be the last work of the dying artist. The three high and wide windows, which reached down to the ground, and looked upon the garden, were open; the bright rays of the evening sun shone upon the fresh verdure of the young leaves, and threw a cheerful light into the picturesque old room, and on the figures of the monks, who, waiting for admission, had arranged themselves into a group around the priest. He, surrounded by the choristers, stood in the midst, bearing the Host. When the doors were opened, they disclosed a second large room, and opposite to the door, a bed, the curtains of which were undrawn. Lionel followed them up to the door; but here one of the lay-brothers, by order of the officiating monk, gave him an injunction not to disturb the holy serenity of the sick man by his anxiously expected appearance.

Lionel saw the door shut against him. Confused, he leaned his head against the door-post, and listened to the regular and monotonous responses

of the monks, which marked the progress of the holy office. His mind detached itself more and more from earthly things. He fancied himself included in the holy vows, which resounded in his ears: his thoughts were gradually absorbed in an earnest longing for the consolations of religion, and his physical exhaustion caused a short respite to his over-excited mind. He was first restored to consciousness by a noise behind him, which startled him; when, rising and recollecting himself, he turned, and saw the boy who had been his guide, in tears, and kneeling before Lesueur's picture, round which he was spreading fresh flowers. He moved slowly towards him, and stood in front of the picture, but without seeing it, for he was engrossed by his compassion for the weeping boy, who, having completed his task, retired.

Lionel sank into a chair. Soon he fancied he heard soft music approaching. He sat upright to listen. Flora stood before him! She appeared in glory, floating upon light clouds, clad in a white robe, with a blue starred mantle over her shoulders; the crown of martyrdom was in her auburn hair, surrounded by a glory; an angelic expression in her childish eyes; a sweet smile playing on her beautiful mouth; a palm-branch in her delicate white hand! She seemed to be hovering towards him; her small bare foot just touched the edge of the cloud, which strove to envelope her. She seemed to bend gently

forward, holding forth the palm-branch—the emblem of peace—as a token of forgiveness from the world above, and of invitation to all those, still weary and heavy-laden, on earth.

“ Flora ! Flora ! ” exclaimed Lionel, and fell upon his knees. “ Thou invitest me to everlasting peace. I am thine to the innermost recesses of my heart ! Thou callest me to our home : here am I ! Take me !—have pity on the sinner ! Even in my transgressions against thee, I am thine, and thine alone ! Sainted object of my passion ! descend and take me with thee ! ”

Full of hopes and visions, and yearnings for eternal reconciliation with her, his head sank down on the flower-strewn carpet in front of Lesueur’s picture, which had transformed the features of his ardently beloved Flora into those of a glorified saint. A hand was gently laid upon his shoulder. He rose up ; the venerable priest who had given the holy unction to Lesueur was bending over him with a mild and serious expression.

“ Take courage, young man,” said he, in a low voice. “ The duties of friendship summon you to the bed of the dying. The weary pilgrim already tastes the eternal rest of the world above. Compose and sanctify your mind ; withdraw it from this world, of which he has already taken leave. He is in perfect peace ; but he desires to see you, and to perform what he considers his last

duty on earth. Render yourself worthy, then, to share the last moments of his purified spirit: strive to be a partaker of that peace which is his portion."

"Hear my confession," cried Lionel. "Suffer my heart to unburden itself to you, reverend father. Grant to me that consolation with which your pious mind is filled."

"Not now," the priest replied with earnestness; "not now, my son. Your friend's moments are numbered. Fulfil this duty first; and should you afterwards need a confessor, send to the monastery of St. Sulpice, and Prior Tronçon will hear your confession."

Lionel strove to summon up all his fortitude: his looks so plainly expressed the state of his mind, that the worthy father, filled with compassion, laid his hand upon his burning forehead, and almost irresistibly gave him his blessing. Lionel saw him vanish in the train of his brethren,—the door of the chamber of death was opened, and he stood before the saint-like countenance of Lesueur.

Lesueur looked at Lionel: bitterly he had hated, deeply he had execrated him; but the approach of death had mitigated and chastened these feelings before his entrance; and now that he beheld him, his pale face bearing such evident marks of grief and remorse, he scarcely recognised the young and handsome man whom he had formerly

seen, and certainly not the hardened courtier whom he had thought himself justified in hating. "Yes, yes," said he, feebly; "I discern God's justice. He has already visited you, poor perverted sinner, and you are doing bitter penance in your heart."

"Oh, never, never can it be bitter enough!" ejaculated Lionel; and he knelt by the bed of the dying man. "Should I never experience a moment's peace again, still will it not be too severe a penance. Ah, Lesueur, if you knew how I feel it more and more deeply every day, you would compassionate me!" He hid his face, and heard a deep sigh near him. At the foot of the bed knelt a priest in silent prayer,—he was completely concealed by the curtain.

"Great and fearful is your sin; but I would know the depth and the measure of your iniquity. I, who was her friend,—her *protégé*,—her convert,—I beg you to answer me one question; you will not conceal the truth from one who is dying. Will you answer me?"

"I will," said Lionel.

"What did the Marquis de Souvré say to you just before your wedding?"

"That I was *free*! And when I besought him to give me further information, he put me off with the repetition of these words. Not till the next morning did I hear of her death."

"Her death?" cried Lesueur, clasping his hands together; "her death? Unhappy man, do you not know that she was living?—that she, your only lawful wife,—that *she* was living when you married another?"

A low groan was Lionel's only reply. He fell convulsively upon the bed, whilst his distended eyes, fixed upon Lesueur, sufficiently indicated his fearful state.

"Yes," continued Lesueur, with a firmer voice, "although death was long suspended over her, still she was destined to live. When the vicar was at length enabled to send me this intelligence, it was too late:—the crime was already committed:—you were married; and Flora already shewed symptoms of decline. I made those about her promise to keep her in ignorance,—to speak of you as engaged in the war,—to make her believe that you thought she was dead."

"Oh, Heaven!" exclaimed Lionel; "the monster who deceived me,—who suffered me to commit this dreadful crime!"

"Blame yourself, not others," muttered the hidden priest: "you were willingly deceived."

Lionel, dismayed, then first beheld the dark figure which, concealed, knelt near him: he shuddered at hearing what seemed the voice of his conscience. He wept, and cried to the dying man, "Tell me—oh, tell me, for the love of God!"

—when did Flora die? and where,—where is my child?"

"Hear me," said Lesueur. "You are less guilty than I supposed you. It seems clear that you believed her to be dead when you bound yourself by this second tie; and as you are, therefore, less guilty than I imagined you to be, I will administer those drops of comfort which may, perhaps, in some degree soften your agony. Listen, then. Flora still lives, but is on the brink of the grave; and her earnest, her only wish, is to see you once again."

At these words, Lionel, uttering a cry, sprang up: his next impulse was to depart,—to go to her;—it was his all-engrossing thought.

"Stop!" cried Lesueur, and he grasped his coat.

"Let me go," entreated Lionel: "I must set off—I must go to her instantly—without delay."

"Not before you have given me your solemn promise that you will not disturb her angelic peace,—that you will keep her in ignorance of the iniquity which has been committed," said Lesneur, with all his former strength. "If you go only to disburden the anguish of your overloaded heart upon her, may the curse of the misery you have caused fall upon you! None of those about her wish to see you,—how should they?—but Flora's

desire is so earnest,—neither suffering her to live or die,—that it has overcome their repugnance."

"Oh, let me—let me go to Flora, to my adored wife! I have no other duty so sacred. She shall find in me nothing but her devoted husband."

"And Victorine?" exclaimed the hidden figure, as it suddenly rose from the ground, and Fénélon stood before Lionel, with pallid face and eyes flashing with indignation.

Lionel hid his face, but for a moment only. No other feeling could compete with that which had just been roused. "And yet—yet I must go! If it be possible, Fénélon, spare Victorine; protect her,—not for my sake, but for hers. I cannot now think of her. I have but one duty,—but one feeling. But pray—pray for me, as you pray for the condemned criminal,—and farewell!"

"Miserable man!" exclaimed Fénélon; "the wretched sport of every wind! Two prizes were bestowed upon you,—both to be destroyed!"

Lionel heard not his words. Bending over Lesueur, and pressing his cold hand, he took his last earthly farewell of him. He raised his hands imploringly towards Fénélon, and hurried out of the room. He rushed on like a madman; he would have set off on foot, but his carriage stood at the gate. He sprang into it, and called to the

coachman to drive rapidly on, the first stage to St. Roche ! But the carriage did not move ; the man waited to have his orders repeated, supposing he must have misunderstood. But Lionel reiterated them with an earnestness which intimated that something extraordinary had occurred. The carriage then drove off at a rapid pace ; and no thought crossed Lionel's mind that his son was to be christened that day at the Hôtel de Soubise.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE carriage of the Count de Crécy, without servants or luggage, flew along the road which traversed the valley of St. Roche. No one at the castle had any suspicion who it was that was coming. Flora had often said in the course of the last few days "that he came to her every day, and that he wept long and bitterly at her feet; but he looked so pale, and so different from what he used to do, that it made her cry when he came." No one paid any regard to this, though none ventured to contradict her. But any one who had observed her from the adjoining room, when she thought she was alone, could plainly discern that her mind was unusually disturbed. She would look round the empty room with a tender and melancholy expression, till the tears dropped from her eyes; then she would bend forward, and stretch her thin white hands as if to reach some imaginary object before her. Who could have disturbed her by questions? All those who had been about her since her misfortune had bound themselves to silence. The heart of every one was overflowing

at her sad fate; but, controlling themselves, all awaited the result in pious resignation.

Her malady had for long got so complete a hold of her as to leave little hope of her recovery, and had deprived her of her power of recollection. The doctor was of opinion, from the first, that so violent an excitement at so critical a time would be fatal. And when he had brought her through the first dangerous attack of fever, he could only watch to see what turn nature would take for her relief: for when he felt her pulse beating with a rapidity not to be counted, he could not encourage himself or others in a hope of her restoration—and scarcely could any one desire it. She continued long in a state of mental aberration and bodily weakness, during which she would fancy herself still a child playing in the woods at Stirlingwood, unconscious of the presence of her attendants. They grieved to think that this happy state must cease with the recovery of her reason. The first symptom of a crisis was evident when she suddenly called "*Lionel!*" With the same suddenness she returned to her former state; her tears flowed in torrents; she gave no answer to any one but this, "He loved me so much!" Then she relapsed into profound silence; thoughts and recollections had evidently been aroused within her, but she uttered not a word. She had not as yet ever thought of her child, nor had it ever been

brought near her. The vicar now attempted to revive her recollection of it, and very soon it was evident that she listened, and that the cloud which hung over her faculties began gradually to dissipate. How touching was it to watch the progress of returning consciousness in that pale angelic face ! Suddenly, a beautiful blush overspread her livid cheek, her eyes glistened, and, sobbing like a child, she said, "A little darling baby, that is mine !"

Then Amy laid the sleeping infant on her lap, and drew back the mantle which covered its little head. Flora instantly recollected it, and a gush of delight once more poured into her broken heart. " My baby ! my darling little child !" she said continually, in a low trembling tone, but with an intensity of rapturous joy so touching, that the vicar and Amy, quite overcome by it, retreated to give vent to their feelings in tears of mixed grief and joy.

They left her alone a long time ; she took notice of nothing but her child. At last it awoke, stretched itself quietly, opened and blinked its bright little eyes, still struggling with sleep, and began to beat its little hands about ; and then a gentle smile was perceptible on Flora's face. Instinctively she tried to raise it to her lips, but she had not sufficient strength. The child became restless, and began to whimper. She was fright-

ened, and turned red. She made an effort and pressed it to her bosom, but the child only cried louder. The doctor, who had just arrived, forcibly kept back her friends: "Leave her to herself," said the judicious man, "this will cause her to collect her ideas. How powerfully does God speak in the voice of nature!"

Her anxiety to appease the infant became more evident: but too soon had she regained a glimmering of her lost happiness. With the recollection of how she had formerly quieted him, returned also that of her long separation from him: she sighed deeply, and her feeble arms dropped: her child brought back her consciousness and all her sorrows. She wept aloud over it, and her friends hastened back to her. Amy took the helpless babe from her lap. She then dried her tears, and attempted to stand up; but her strength failed, and the doctor and Veronica supported her. Her eyes, which followed Amy's steps, directed them the way she wished to go. In the next room she found the nurse with the child at her breast. At this sight she stood still and fell into deep thought; then she sat down in a chair close to the nurse, and saw and understood that her child derived its sustenance and consolation from another. She heaved sighs long and deep, her tears fell fast, and a low and piteous moan evinced that she began gradually to comprehend the full weight of her woe. Even the nurse

burst into tears ; and, with the pretty rosy-cheeked baby, that had dropped asleep again, in her arms, she knelt down in front of its unhappy mother. This drew the sting from her grief ; the soft breath issuing from its little red lips seemed to revive her ; the sight of its beauty banished the painful associations from her mind, and her expression of delight returned as she gazed upon it. But her affectionate caresses awoke it again : it looked up and gazed at her ; then looking round, and catching sight of the nurse's face, it laughed and crowed with delight. Flora's eyes then turned towards this first object of her infant's love ; and when she saw the look of affection with which the good woman returned this mark of recognition, she too smiled kindly upon her, and gently stroked her hand down her good-humoured face.

From that time forth her existence was tranquil and apparently wrapt in her child, over which she would often pray in the most touching manner—conversing as it were with God, and ever on the subject of his beautiful and wonderful works. It seemed evident to all that God was already drawing her to Himself, and that He had hidden the things of this world from her, to render her passage hence more easy. She seemed to have no perception of her own state. She never complained, but sometimes she would lay her wasted hand upon her bosom ; and when the doctor asked her if she felt

any pain, she meekly replied, "Always! always!" Her quick feverish pulse, and the frequent breaking of blood-vessels, left no doubt as to the nature of her disease.

In the early part of the spring a change took place in the state of her mind. Little Reginald had just made his first attempt to raise himself up by the help of his mother's chair, and this occurrence had drawn from her an exclamation of delight. When Amy came in on hearing it, she perceived the cause of the innocent joy which beamed in her countenance, and she saw the beautiful child, who would hardly ever be separated from his mother, laughing and chuckling with delight at this first achievement, whilst his little chubby hands tightly grasped the leg of the chair.

Amy knelt down to fondle this only solace of her sad and gloomy heart; and then she heard Flora sigh deeply, and utter the almost forgotten name of *Lionel*.

"Where is he now, Amy?" said she; "I can't think and remember things as I used to do, but he must have been away a long time; and now his child is so engaging: he must come soon, or he will be running to meet him."

Amy made no answer: her feelings were too bitter. She had hoped that Flora had quite forgotten her murderer; but her recollection of him now was calm and affectionate, and seemed inter-

woven with her own existence. She continued : “ That pale man, who I always took for a fiend, drove him away from me. Poor Lionel ! how much you must have to endure in that wicked world you are compelled to live in. Ah ! how we will love you and cherish you when you come back to us ; and now there is one more to love you. But yonder, who is there to love you ? There, your mother even is hardened ; for now I know that she has not walked in the ways of God. This must grieve your heart sorely. But where is he, Amy ? And is it long since he went away ? ”

“ He is gone to the war with the king,” Amy brought out at length, for the hated falsehood stuck in her throat ; “ and you have been ill a long time.”

By degrees only recollections were awakened and connected in her mind, weakened as it was by long illness. Weary and exhausted, her head sank back upon the chair, and a short feverish sleep closed her bright but languid eyes. Amy remained with the child at her feet. Its talking and crowing did not disturb her slumbers, and when it reached her ears, the expression of her sleeping face became sweeter and happier ; these infantine sounds seemed to mingle with and inspire her innocent dreams. But from that hour the thought of Lionel was, next to that of her child, uppermost in her mind ; and she began to offer

long and most affecting prayers for him, and to entreat God to protect him who stood in so great need of his assistance, and to guide him through temptation ; that He would preserve his soul, and evermore be with him. Then she would be silent ; and when she resumed her prayers, it was as if God had been answering her during that time, for she would say, “ I knew it : I was sure that Thou wouldst abide with him ; and I will not any more be so troubled on account of him, for Thou carest for him.”

Often did Amy and the doctor converse together of her cruel fate, the full extent of which they had heard from Lesueur, and they always agreed that it must be kept secret from her.

“ It will not be long necessary,” said the doctor, with emotion ; “ the grass is getting green, the buds are bursting,—the flowers, when they blow, will blow over her grave.”

As the probable fulfilment of the doctor’s predictions became more and more evident, so did Flora’s desire to see Lionel become more earnest ; and this was the cause of the last communication made to Lesueur. Her friends remarked that she seemed to have some suspicion of her approaching dissolution. She had always attributed her extreme weakness, when she was sufficiently herself to be conscious of it, to the birth of her child. She now frequently wished to get up and help little

Reginald in his attempts to stand alone, which daily became more vigorous ; but she felt that she was no longer able, and she inquired of Amy what could be the cause. The broken-hearted woman eluded answering these inquiries as best she could, but her half-replies seemed to produce thoughts which disclosed themselves in Flora's prayers. The only manifestation of what passed within her was in the earnest and long conversations she daily carried on aloud with God.

“ Thou couldst leave me with my child. Thou couldst give strength to my limbs to follow him, if it were Thy will. And Lionel—how will he weep, if I should be gone to Thee, and he should see me no more ! ” Then she would continue : “ Yes, truly Thou knowest what is best, and Thou knowest, too, that I am ready to obey thy call. But the life Thou hast given me here is full of pleasantness, and so long as thou willest it to continue, it is precious. One thing only grant to me :—that I may see him again before I die. Send him ;—wherever he may be, set him at liberty and bring him to me, that I may have the joy of seeing him once more.” Then she would thank God for answering her, and telling her that He would send him. Every day was this repeated. And she wondered he did not come ; and then again she was comforted by a renewal of the promise. By this means were the hearts of her friends brought to relent ;

and, however strong their feelings were against Lionel, Flora unconsciously softened them, and inclined them to wish for his arrival, and to apply to Lesueur to accomplish that which she already anticipated, and which her rapidly declining strength rendered daily more urgent.

Lionel alighted from his carriage at the foot of the ascent to the castle, for he shuddered nervously as he approached the dying bed of this angel; and fearful of causing any disturbance by his arrival, he glided quietly in.

How beautiful St. Roche looked in all the luxuriance of its fresh verdure ! He felt, but had no power to enjoy it. As he passed gently through the rooms, the soft and fragrant breezes of a warm May day entered at the open doors and windows. Lionel heard people speaking in the rooms on one side ; but those which led to Flora's boudoir were still and empty.

He had now reached the last room, which adjoined the boudoir. There she might be ; and the thought suggested itself whether she ought not to be prepared for his appearance. Hesitating whether to proceed or not, he stopped to listen. A sound caught his ear, — a kind of chuckling laugh. A recollection suddenly struck him, and he opened the door gently. He was not mistaken. Upon a green carpet, which was spread near the window, a beautiful child, in a short white frock,

which left its arms and legs bare, was making vigorous attempts, by crawling and working its way onwards, to reach some shining little cups and saucers which were at the further extremity of the carpet, placed there to attract it. It shoved itself along with its little pink feet, with an eagerness and at a rate which made its cheeks glow; and the nearer it got to the object, the louder it crowed and screamed with delight. A woman, in the dress of the country, sat upon a cushion near him; her back was turned to Lionel, but he could see how carefully she watched the child; for once when it slipped and lay a moment upon its face, she was at hand to help it before it had time to recover itself. The eager little crawler would look round at her too, at every advance he made, and uttered a joyous scream if she clapped her hands, and then set to work again.

Lionel knew it was his child, and felt an inexpressible thrill of delight. He went up to the carpet. The child, with a scream of joy, had just seized hold of the little shining plate, which rolled away to Lionel's foot. He knelt down, and held it out to him. The child looked at him with surprise, then laughed, and made an effort to grasp the plate. Lionel held it up higher: then the little creature tried to climb up his knees after it; and Lionel caught him in his arms, and held him up till at last he got hold of the desired object,

chuckling loud with delight. Lionel's heart was full to bursting. He held his child in his arms ; he felt that its little legs, strong and active as they were, were yet unable to support it. He pressed it to his bosom, and it was not shy or afraid of him.

The nurse sat still and watched him. She understood it all the first moment she saw the strange gentleman. The simple and uneducated are apt to read most correctly the book of nature.

“ Bring him to me, Lionel,” spoke a soft and well-known voice. But the effect produced upon Lionel was as if a thunderbolt had struck him. He trembled from head to foot, and his agitation was so sudden and excessive, that the child was frightened, struggled in his arms, and began to cry. “ Reginald,” said the same gentle voice, “ oh ! come here ; Lionel, bring him to me.”

Lionel sprang up with the child in his arms, and hastened towards the spot from whence the voice proceeded. Within one of the open glass doors which led out into the garden was placed a large easy chair, in which reclined—as it appeared to Lionel—the glorified spirit of Flora ! He put the child upon her knees, and, being accustomed to find comfort there, it flung its little arms round her neck ; and, as her feeble arms pressed it fervently to her bosom, and the beautiful infant nestled itself in the folds of the white dress which enveloped

her slight form, Lionel fancied he saw an angel shielding this blooming bud of life under her white wings.

But she smiled languidly upon him, as she bent over the child, and held out to him her emaciated hand. He neither shed tears, nor uttered sighs or sound of any kind. His eyes were drinking in such deep misery, that he was speechless. She was dying—she scarcely belonged to earth. Perhaps the next moment those eyelids would drop, and she would be a corpse.

“Ah! Lionel, I well knew how grieved you would be. But it is God’s will. He has told me that I cannot live longer. But He will take care of you and of our child; and so I am easy and content to go to Him, since He wills it so.” After a short pause, she continued, attempting to bend her head down to Lionel: “I have an inward belief that our separation will not be so complete; for though God has not told me so, I think that I shall still be with you sometimes.”

“Oh! take me—take me with you!” ejaculated Lionel; and he buried his head in the cushion upon which her feet rested.

“Ah! I thought of that too; for I was sure you would be willing to go. But God will not have it so. You must live, and go through much; I cannot comprehend what, for my thoughts are

very weak. But this I know—that you are ordained to live."

Lionel wept now. He felt a light cold hand upon his head. He raised himself. Flora had tried to bend down to him; her hair, beautiful as ever, fell in rich masses, and almost concealed her lovely face.

"Lionel," said she, scarcely audibly, "I would have loved you and cherished you so fondly, because the world yonder makes you unhappy. But you came too late—I have no more time."

Her head sank against Lionel's face; he held her in his arms. The child lay like a rose on her lap, playing with its own little hands.

"Flora—dearest Flora! oh! leave me not, leave me not, till you have forgiven me!"

"You always loved me so much, and you still love me," said she, feebly. Then, with an angelic smile, she said, "My Father, I come! Thou hast granted my petition. I have seen him again, and now I am ready to fulfil my part. Take me hence, oh! my God! My sweet darling child!—my own Lionel! My Father, I come!"

The head which rested against his face grew cold and heavy. He felt a slight shiver run through her frame; then all was still: but the weight increased; he was conscious of the truth, but he held her fast. Even the body bereft of

the soul was a shield from the madness which threatened him. The child had crept to its mother's head ; it tried to cling to her ; but the lifeless body gave way, and the child fell into Lionel's arms.

Instinctively he grasped the beautiful little creature, which began playing with its mother's locks, and tried to climb upon her. The nurse came ; she took the child in her arms, and gently raising Flora, laid her back in the chair. Then she saw what had happened, and made a sign to the doctor, who had just entered and was standing at a distance ; whilst Lionel fell with his head at Flora's feet, in that happy state of suspended life which renders us insensible to all misery. The doctor laid his hand upon Flora's cold forehead ; he felt her pulse,—it had ceased to beat. He stood long contemplating that pale, angelic face ; then extending his hand to the vicar, who had just entered with Veronica, he said, mildly, “ Let us rejoice for her ! ”

“ Let us pray ! ” returned the vicar, greatly moved ; and the tears of all flowed unrestrained. But this calm peacefulness was rudely interrupted by the sudden entrance of Amy. No one had courage to inform her of the event that had befallen. She looked with searching glances at the weepers,—she walked up to the chair, laid hold of Flora's lifeless hand, and uttered a piercing shriek. Then

she caught sight of the almost equally lifeless form of Lionel.

“Murderer! murderer!” she screamed; “are you come to take away her last breath? Villain! May the curse of God light upon you!”

“Hush, hush!” interposed the vicar; “disturb not the hallowed peace of this angel! Control your impetuous passions. Do you not read upon that countenance that she died forgiving?”

“Forgiving? forgiving her murderer?” cried Amy. “No, no; I will not believe it! She could not forgive him. May the curse this deed has entailed ever cleave to him!”

The bystanders were much shocked to see how the grief and rage, which as long as Flora lived she had suppressed, now burst forth with all the violence of despair. They felt both pity and horror.

Amy’s eyes flashed wildly: they rested upon the form of Lionel, as if they sought to wither him by their glance. “Take him away!” she cried. “Away, away with him! He has no longer any right to be near her. He dares not touch her. She shall not be sullied by his contact.

“Gently — control yourself,” said the doctor, sternly. “You are behaving sinfully and cruelly. Do you not see that he is already almost bereft of life?”

"Ah! you take his part, do you? You have already forgotten all the misery that he occasioned? You can forgive him, can you? Then you are as bad as he is, and I renounce you too. I will away,—away from all mankind! But my curse will remain with him and those who side with him! It will rest on all that belongs to him, and all that he still dares to love! I will live to perpetuate the memory of his sins, and my daily business shall be to pursue him with my curses!"

She rushed away into the sanctuary of her darling,—into Flora's boudoir. A fall was heard. The women would have gone to her, but the doctor prevented them: "No," said he; "let her alone; her wild, ungovernable nature must have an outbreak,—we cannot help her."

"Let us pray, then!" repeated the vicar; and they all knelt down round Flora's sainted corpse. The vicar recited from memory some of the prayers from the service for the dead. He seemed to be praying over two corpses; for Lionel still lay motionless at her feet. But the miserable man still lived. The sound of the words had fallen upon his ears for some time before he recovered further consciousness. A shudder announced his first sense of returning life; for he felt that deep despair which admits of no consolation, and leaves no

means of escape from hopeless misery. In the midst of the vicar's prayer he raised himself, looked round upon all, and again sank down with his head on Flora's lap. His aspect had that softening effect upon all around him which is produced by the just chastisement of heaven falling upon the offender, and silencing the hatred of his fellow-creatures. A feeling of pious compassion now reigned in the breasts of all Flora's deeply-sorrowing friends. The vicar pronounced a blessing upon the corpse, and then implored mercy for her afflicted husband, and protection for the motherless babe. His prayers breathed pardon and peace. He assumed that all present shared his feelings, and he uttered them in the name of all.

They arose from their knees. The nurse, who still knelt by Flora's side, bearing the sleeping infant in her arms, said, in her frank and simple manner, to the vicar, "Sir, I was by when our dear lady received her husband. She was full of affection to him, and grieved that she had not time left to shew him love enough. I only mention this, that we may behave to the poor gentleman according to her wishes."

"You are right. We will do so," replied the vicar, gravely. He and the doctor approaching Lionel, addressed him by name. He started,

and looked up in terror. His pale lips articulated, "Flora's friends ! you can have no pity for me !" " We have no right to judge you. God administers judgment: may He be merciful to us all !" said the vicar. " And this angel has forgiven you; see, it is written on her placid brow."

Lionel looked at her; her hair was now parted, leaving her pale face uncovered. It still bore its own peculiar character—the sweet childlike smile, but now hallowed by a celestial peace. The felicity of the blessed rested upon it. Lionel contemplated, and was profoundly moved by it. That image, like a clear bright torch, shed its rays over all his remaining life—a confused tissue of remorse and of sin : Flora, its blackest crime !—Flora, its brightest light !

He rose, and was consoled by a sense of his own serious illness.

" Flora, my wife, thou hast forgiven me, and thou art avenged ! "

He was supported by his two companions, and yielded to their entreaties that he would leave the spot. He felt that his guilt rendered any opposition to her friends unjustifiable; besides that acute pains in his head and chest almost deprived him of his senses. He tore himself away from the sight of her angel face, and saw it no more. The doctor had him put to bed, and ascertained his condition.

The malady, of which the seeds had long lain dormant in his veins, now declared itself.

Veronica, in the meantime, made every arrangement for the performance of the last sad offices to Flora. The corpse remained perfectly unchanged. Her coffin was placed in the vault where the good Queen Claude rested in solitary peace, until another should be constructed on that spot where, as they said, she had received her death-blow, viz. under the window in the little flower-garden which she had herself planned, and over which her eyes, directed by Souvré, had followed Lionel's travelling-carriage. Under the green turf and the flowers she had loved so much her beloved remains should rest.

Amy's duties were carefully performed by these sorrowing friends. Her grief did not abate; it embittered her naturally passionate disposition. She rejected with rudeness and anger every advance made towards her. She carried away the child, and seemed to wish to keep it out of sight of the others. The nurse was obliged to seclude herself with her; and she was the only person the wretched woman would allow to do anything for her. When the funeral was over, she locked up Flora's rooms, and would permit no one to enter them.

In the meantime, in a distant part of the castle,

lay its unhappy lord, dangerously ill; and the doctor, the vicar, and Veronica together nursed and tended him. During many weeks his state continued one of great danger. All the letters which came from Paris remained unopened, and the messengers returned without any answer; for he was in a state of delirium. At last arrived his valet-de-chambre. Shocked and grieved, he silently entered upon his services, and wrote an account of his master's condition, for no one had felt inclined to undertake that office before. The family physician of the Crécys arrived speedily; he found his state most critical, but having satisfied himself of the skill and ability of the St. Roche doctor, he returned to Paris.

Youth prevailed; and Lionel recovered. But how changed and aged! His fine brown hair was tinged with grey; his form was bent, and his emaciation was fearful. He sat all day long in the little garden, and watched the workmen as they worked at Flora's grave. He asked no questions: the doctor guessed his thoughts, and spared him. Amy Gray obstinately refused to let him see his child, and fastened her doors; but when he was sitting in the garden, he sometimes heard it laughing and crowing through the open windows: these sounds thrilled through him, and, with a sigh, he stretched out his arms imploringly for it. But

when he heard that Amy refused to let him have it, he said, "I have no right to demand it;" and this privation was added to his other sufferings.

He had been a month at St. Roche, and the servant, pressed by numerous communications from Paris, attempted to persuade him to return there. But Lionel never made any answer, and the poor man was at a loss to know how to proceed. He thought his master must have lost his memory, for the letters which he had brought to him remained unopened, and seemed not to excite the smallest interest. At last he had recourse to the vicar and the doctor, who promised him their aid.

Lionel listened to them quietly, as he sat opposite to the new grave, his eye seeming to pierce through the ground—it was nearly ready to receive the coffin. "Let my coffin be placed near hers hereafter," he said at length, with great earnestness.

"That arrangement can be easily made, if you wish it," replied the vicar. "But every duty should be attended to. You have made arrangement for your death, now do so for your life also. Consider how many claims there are upon it—how many are entrusted to your charge."

"I think the best I can do by them is not to

see them again," answered Lionel, with a sigh. "What can I now be to them? I should find a wife whom I have dishonoured:—a child whom I have injured:—I must again see a mother who never loved me, and has abused my miserable weakness to the accomplishment of her own ends. They cannot bring any alleviation to my misery: it is better that I should languish here, and all should remain unknown there."

"My dear sir," interposed the vicar, "this is a very great error; and I speak the more urgently to you upon the subject, because I am well assured that Flora, that blessed angel, would have used the same exhortations. You must now shew yourself worthy of her love and her forgiveness. Think of your innocent and now lawful wife. Can you heal Flora's broken heart, by causing her also to die of grief?"

Lionel shuddered, and raised his eyes. "Poor Victorine!" said he, "how little has she deserved such a fate! Oh, my mother! *you* have been the cause of all my sin, of all my misery. May God forgive you!—*I* cannot!"

"How can *you* be unforgiving to whom Flora has set such an example of forgiveness?" said the doctor. "She is your mother, young man; and the duty of children to their parents never ceases. You might have maintained your own will: do not

make her answerable for that which you had the full power to oppose."

"Read this letter, sir," said the vicar, "which came long ago; and then take your resolution to return."

"And my child!" exclaimed Lionel, breaking the seal of his letter.

"I think, count," replied the doctor, "that we ought to have some consideration for the miserable woman who now guards it so jealously. We might have much to answer for, were we to press too hard upon her in her present wild and desperate state. The first tender years of the child will be well cared for by her. We can all testify to her capability, besides that we shall always overlook her; which, in my case at least, as doctor, she will not attempt to avoid, knowing that she may stand in need of my assistance."

Lionel remained silent; and when his friends saw his eyes rest upon the letter which was now unfolded, they withdrew to a little distance, but still observed him.

"Your sudden separation from me," wrote Victorine, "has not been satisfactorily explained by any of the reasons alleged for it. Your abrupt departure must have been occasioned by some extraordinary event. For a trifling cause you would not have left me, nor have thrown your family

into so serious an embarrassment. They now tell me that you are ill, but will not let me go to you. I shall await your answer, and hope that you will yourself give me leave to join you, if your health is not sufficiently recovered to allow you to travel, for my proper place is by your side. I have no more urgent duty, and my own health would not now incur any risk. Let us be frank. I can hardly express to you how strangely it affects me that anything like a mystery should so suddenly have sprung up between us. Whatever it may be, make me your friend and confidante, as of right I ought to be. I trust no one here; I hear with reluctance and mistrust all that they tell me of you. I am not able to contradict them, but I feel that it is not true. To you only will I listen, and you only believe. If you do not answer this, I shall set out. May God preserve you!

“VICTORINE.”

“If you do not answer, I shall set out!” exclaimed Lionel. “Oh! no; that must not be. Her feet must not tread this ground. I cannot see her *here*.”

“Then you must go to her,” said both the friends, who had returned to his side. “That noble creature ought not to be thrown into so embarrassing a position as that in which she would unavoidably be placed here. Spare *her*, at least.

You will not recover what you have lost by making her a victim too."

"Ah! my kind friends, I yield to your counsels," said Lionel; "for I have no longer any right to seek refuge in this solitude, which alone could soothe me now. But the curse which I have drawn down upon my head will shed its influence over every relation and every engagement of my future life. I shall endeavour to protect Victorine by my return; but my altered looks, my shattered state of body and mind, cannot but be obvious to her. And if she asks for an explanation, I must either conceal the truth, and thus repel her from me; or else confess it, and thereby render her miserable for ever."

His companions were silent. Both were deeply affected by his melancholy situation, and felt a painful conviction that he would never have strength of mind to make the exertions necessary to extricate himself from its difficulties. But as long as they remained together, both endeavoured to give him encouragement and support in his depressed state, and to persuade him to spare his unhappy wife the knowledge of all that had happened; for, from what they had gathered of the proud spirit of the young countess, they were inclined to think that the discovery of the crime, which had rendered her marriage unlawful, would lead her to desire a separation, which would make

both equally unhappy. But they were uncertain whether their endeavours would produce any good effects. He had fallen under the dominion of a misanthropical bitterness of spirit and contempt of life, which they could only attribute to a want of religious principle ; and this left them but little hope for his future life.

Here we must leave him, to take a review of the events that had occurred, and the actual position of circumstances which, in such a frame of mind, he was about to encounter.

## CHAPTER IX.

If, again reverting to the particular state of society at that time, we recollect the supreme eminence of Louis XIV.—the object almost of idolatry—we may form some idea of the sensation which an affront to his sacred person, and an apparent disregard of his favour, were likely to produce.

Monsieur went immediately to the king, although it was not his privileged hour: an act of boldness which amazed Louis; and he looked with alarm on his brother's heated and excited countenance, fearing that he must be ill. But he was soon made acquainted with the offence against his dignity; and he instantly decreed the punishment. He dismissed the young count from his office in the queen's household, and it was hinted to the family to absent themselves from court.

In vain did the marshal, with obstinate despair, wait on the steps of the royal palace, to present his earnest petition, and on his knees to supplicate pardon. Nobody dared even to utter the renowned name of the Marshal de Crécy. To call to mind

such a breach of respect towards majesty was to become a participator in it. Except the messenger, who conveyed in due form to the family the announcement of their disgrace, no one crossed the threshold of the proscribed house, and the king appeared to have forgotten its existence.

The chastisement thus inflicted upon Madame de Crécy was perhaps the only one she would really feel, or be unable to avert. She endeavoured to place herself in the best position that remained to her ; but still she found herself unavoidably deprived of many advantages and privileges hitherto enjoyed ; and she had to encounter a series of vexations and annoyances, which she could hardly have believed possible. To these were added the constant apprehension that the true cause of Lionel's absence must transpire. The good-natured Duchesse de Lesdiguières had not been forbidden the court ; but she had too much pride and delicacy to appear there whilst the family to which her daughter now belonged was in disgrace. She beset the maréchale with her surmises and her inquiries, which, as long as it was possible, she evaded. At length, however, she communicated to her, as well as to the anxious Victorine, that Lionel, in one of his hypochondriacal humours, being much put out by the idea of the ceremony, which he thought so full of risk to Victorine, and angry at being obliged to allow her to

undergo it, had taken flight, without luggage or attendants, to St. Roche, where he was immediately seized with a dangerous illness ; a sufficient proof of the state of feverish frenzy in which he had undertaken the journey. Victorine wished to set out immediately, and go to him ; but, as the doctors sided with her parents in withholding their consent, she was obliged to yield and to remain. But her suspicions were awakened, and her anxiety increased on her husband's account.

The maréchale proposed that, as soon as the month of her daughter-in-law's confinement should have expired, both families should go to Monçay, her château, about twenty miles distant from Paris. The preparatory arrangements were soon made, being hastened by the maréchale, who was impatient to leave Paris, which her altered circumstances and the banishment from Versailles rendered intolerable to her. But her plans were destined to be again thwarted, and she had to learn submission to circumstances—a lesson hitherto little known to or practised by her.

On the day fixed for the journey, intelligence was brought to her that the marshal had had a severe fall in his room, and that the surgeon had thought it necessary to bleed him. She was exceedingly vexed and annoyed, and felt that she ought to go to him, but was inwardly resolved that this accident should not interfere with her

departure, as her stay in Paris became every day more irksome.

She repaired to the marshal's apartments in no very amiable temper, which was not improved by finding the servants weeping and wringing their hands, and rushing by, regardless of her, to fulfil some pressing errand. When she reached her husband's bed-chamber, she stopped to listen. The chaplain and others surrounded the bed, while the doctor was supporting the marshal in his arms. But the death-rattle was a sound not to be mistaken, and left no doubt of what was passing. With trembling limbs, the maréchale advanced in alarm, and exclaimed, in a hoarse voice, "What is the matter here?" No one answered. "Marshal, marshal! what is it? Recover yourself;—courage! be a man!" Thus she addressed him, though already convinced of the truth.

"A man he was, madam, and a great man!" said the doctor, laying him back upon his hard pillows; "but even great men must die."

"Die!" exclaimed the maréchale. "Doctor, it's impossible! Die!—he was perfectly well this morning—a healthy man."

"Convince yourself," said the doctor, retreating. "The will of man here finds a barrier which even you, madam, cannot remove. The fall, which in itself would not have been of any serious consequence, was occasioned by a fit of apoplexy. The

blood had ceased to flow, though, being in the hotel when the event took place, I applied the lancet instantly."

Madame de Crécy approached nearer. She shuddered at the sight of the fixed and rigid face of the husband she had never loved. He retained the sternness of his countenance, and she could not bring herself to touch him. Her natural hardness and insensibility had been so much increased by the recent events, that she could not prevail upon herself to utter a kind word, or shew a sign of tenderness. She felt nothing but displeasure at her plans being overthrown, and saw only a confused vision of consequences, which might be either favourable or detrimental to her.

"A renowned man,—a great hero,—a perfect nobleman," said she at length, coldly; "a prop to the throne, from whence came his death-blow. It will have no further power to deny his wishes now. His name will be forced on the ears of him whose childhood he helped to defend. Gentlemen," continued she, "you will give orders for the preparation of the customary solemnities. I will desire the household to give you their assistance. The steward will receive instructions for the ceremonial. You, sir," addressing the chaplain, "will, in my name, notify this event to the Archbishop De Noailles. I hope he will remember what he owes

to the house of Crécy-Chabanne. An express must be despatched to St. Roche."

After giving these directions, she left the chamber of death, and passed by the weeping servants with a cold, stern countenance. Before she reached her own apartments, her mind had taken a pretty accurate survey of this new state of things ; and though she did not acknowledge it to herself, she had come to the conclusion that it was quite as well the worn-out old man should be at rest, and that the consequences might at that moment be favourable rather than otherwise.

She sent, in the first instance, to the Duke de Lesdiguières, and commissioned him to announce the unexpected event to the king.

With a composure which was quite natural to her cold, unfeeling heart, she gave her orders for the funeral decorations. From the portico, over which was hung a large escutcheon, and on either side of which stood two heralds bearing black banners, all the way to the apartments of the family, the whole house was hung with black ; the servants, male and female, were put into deep mourning, and the ladies of the family wore long black veils and hoods.

The grand saloon was draped with black velvet so thickly that no ray of daylight could enter. Hundreds of torches replaced the beams of the sun. The embalmed corpse of the marshal was raised

upon a daïs; his orders, his truncheon, sword, spurs, and helmet, were placed beside the bier, round which pages, wearing black crape scarfs, and holding wax-lights in their hands, kept silent watch.

This group was surrounded by a choir of monks with a few officiating priests, who, from morning till night, recited masses; for the Archbishop De Noailles had *not* forgotten what he owed to the house of Crécy-Chabanne, and due notice *had been* given of this death to the appointed monasteries. Besides these, the whole of the marshal's household by turns watched round the coffin, whilst the choirmen, in procession, waved their censers at regular intervals, and filled the place with clouds of incense.

The maréchale, with infinite tact, appeared to have forgotten the situation in which she then stood with regard to the court. Messengers of woe were sent to announce the event at the houses of all those whose rank entitled them to this mark of respect. There was a short pause; for all waited to see the line that would be adopted at Versailles. It was soon known that the Duke de Lesdiguières had had an audience of the king, and been graciously received, and that the generous monarch would not extend his anger beyond the grave. The Duke de Gêvres and the Prince de Courtenay received his commands to be the bearers

of his majesty's condolences to the house of mourning. This was received as a signal by all the rest; and all the nobility, headed by the representatives of the queens and princesses, again thronged the Hôtel Soubise in grand funereal pomp.

Thus was this house so lately abandoned by all, now bereft of its master, and thereby restored to its former splendour; and the maréchale, whilst she bitterly hated and despised the fickle crowd, felt the proudest triumph at seeing them obliged to retrace their steps, and seek her again after having forsaken her.

Clad in her widow's weeds, she sat under her canopy hung with black draperies during the ordinary hours of reception, without shewing any signs of life except a slight inclination of her head when the customary condolences were addressed to her. On her right sat poor Louise, in great affliction and crying bitterly; on her left was her unhappy daughter-in-law. The nearest relations sat beyond them on either side. The officers of the court only, the maréchale received standing.

But he who was most deeply concerned in this important event — Lionel, now the head of the family of Crécy-Chabanne—where was he?

Messenger upon messenger, and letter after letter, were sent in vain. No answer was returned, or only a few hasty and ambiguous lines from the

valet, which the steward dared not shew to the family, the drift of which, imperfectly communicated, left matters in such obscurity that the maréchale was under the greatest uneasiness.

But what were the sufferings of the amiable Victorine meanwhile! The strict rules of mourning threw fresh obstacles in the way of her leaving her melancholy abode, and each successive day aggravated her sorrow. The active measures which she contemplated were prevented; and her affection for the old marshal was a painful motive for her submission.

All the time which was not devoted to audiences she passed with her child, whose thriving state formed her only consolation and hope. And by his cradle she enjoyed the society of the only friend of her heart,—the virtuous and amiable Madame de Sevigné,—the only lady at court whose notice and affection Victorine had striven with assiduity to gain.

It was the last day before the funeral of the marshal, and the final audience of condolence was over. Relieved of some of the most cumbersome parts of their mourning apparel, the ladies of the house sat together with the Duke and Duchesse de Lesdiguières; all suffering from the constraint imposed upon them by these vain and empty ceremonials, which, however, they could not elude without an apparent want of those feelings which are

really choked by such outward display. They all longed to disperse, and to regain their liberty. But it was the custom to sup in the inner apartments and to remain together till that time, though the presence of each imposed a restraint upon the rest.

Just at this moment a plain travelling-carriage drove under the funereal escutcheon into the portico. The young lord's first salutation was from the two heralds bearing black banners, and then, for the first time, he felt the reality of the mournful tidings.

He was received into the house in silence, and with the feeling of painful anxiety which his extraordinary conduct had imparted even to the servants. The deep mourning which he wore for Flora accorded but too well with the black walls which met his view.

“To the funeral chamber,” articulated Lionel, scarcely audibly. The doors were opened; the ghastly pomp was displayed before him, and the son knelt beside the coffin of his father.

His prayer was one agonised appealing look to heaven. The monks of St. Sulpice recited the mass for the dead aloud over the corpse. The officiating priest added this prayer to the ordinary and prescribed ritual: “We would also commend to Thy mercy those hearts which, burdened by the weight of their own sin, or that of others, and

bowed down in sorrow, turn to Thee. Comfort them and lift them up. The past, Thou hast decreed shall be irrevocable; but Thou canst wash out the guilt therein contracted from all those who earnestly desire to be partakers of Thy divine grace for the time to come. To contrite and penitent hearts all shall be forgiven, and their sin shall not follow them on the path of amendment." He then gave the blessing with so powerful and affecting an emphasis, that Lionel's heart thrilled, and he trembled from the violence of his emotion. He raised his head: Fénélon, the pale priest of St. Sulpice, stood over him with upraised arms, seeming to invoke from heaven the spirit of devout faith with which he inspired the souls of other men.

"Fénélon," cried he, "hast thou the power to loosen and to bind?"

"He has it, whoever he be, who, full of faith, throws himself into the arms of Him who heals the penitent sinner, and gives rest to the troubled soul. To despair on account of sin, is to deny the omnipotence of God."

These words he spoke in a low voice to the kneeling figure. He made the sign of the cross over him, and then joined the procession of monks. But as his tall form glided past him, Lionel heard, as in a low whisper, the words "Spare Victorine." They penetrated to his innermost soul, and they afforded him the guidance which he pro-

bably might have sought in vain from the uncertain dictates of his own feelings.

He rose and followed the servant, who was waiting to conduct him to his mother's apartments. How insufferable was all the parade of grief there displayed!—At length he reached the little saloon where he found his family assembled, so disguised by their deep mourning that he scarcely recognised them. He was expected; yet his arrival took them by surprise. A sudden cry revealed to him the only being towards whom his heart still turned. Overpowered by all that had happened to separate him from his wife, he did not rush into her arms, but knelt at her feet. Victorine had sunk into a chair—her limbs shared the tremour of her heart. Neither spoke; an embarrassing silence pervaded the whole circle; no one understood the feelings of the other. The more elderly were weary of the lachrymose scenes they had gone through, and the arrival of Lionel, of the extent of whose feeling no one was certain, made them apprehend their renewal. They seemed to wait for some indication on his part to prescribe their demeanour.

Madame de Lesdiguières, however, soon broke through this unnatural restraint in her blunt manner. "Come now, my dear son-in-law," she suddenly burst forth, "enough of that! Recover yourself, and consider that we are all by this time quite tired and worn out with affliction. We have

all shewn our Christian sympathy—I am sure it came from my heart too;—but now there must be an end of it; it would be contrary to the old marshal's own wishes, if we were never to cease our lamentations."

Lionel cast a look of inexpressible anguish on his pale wife, and then arose. "I certainly do not wish, madam," said he, "that my presence should protract your grief; but a son may be allowed to feel more than others, who are not placed in so near a relationship."

"Well, that I call reasonable and well said," rejoined the duchess. "One is often puzzled by your strange and extraordinary proceedings, after hearing how wisely you can talk."

Whilst she was speaking, Lionel had silently greeted all present. His mother, however, he could not force himself to meet with his customary salutation; so powerful was the indignation which the sight of her provoked; and the duchess soon gave him an opportunity of venting it.

"Now then, my dear," said she, "I have been waiting anxiously to see you again; for *you* only can explain the occurrence which frightened us all so much on the day of your son's christening. Were you really ill, and did you run away on that account?"

"No, madam," answered Lionel, drily, "I was not ill when I went away; I became so afterwards."

“ There, you see, maréchale,” said the duchess, “ I could not quite believe your story ; for I had seen him only just before, and then all at once he was to be sick and mad, and packed off in consequence ! ”

“ Did my mother say that ? ” inquired Lionel, with emphasis. “ Her mistake is indeed extraordinary ; as she, I think, must have known the cause of my journey better than any body.”

“ Your mother, count ? ” exclaimed the duchess ; “ is that possible ? ”

Madame de Crécy, perplexed and enraged with them both, now spoke : “ It was perhaps excessive weakness on my part to endeavour to explain the folly of my son in a way that appeared to me the best to palliate his conduct. To ascribe an act of insanity to sudden illness, invited a more lenient sentence than was deserved ! ”

“ You had better not have carried your kindness so far,” answered Lionel, coldly ; “ you might have supposed, from circumstances with which you are well acquainted, that I should not feel very desirous of a protection I had so lately learnt how to appreciate.”

The maréchale trembled with rage. Never had she been so addressed by him. She was for a moment at a loss what answer to return, which should express the full extent of her wrath. But the duchess saved her this trouble by again

interposing: "Come, Lionel, I don't understand all this, tell us plainly how it happened."

"Excuse me, madam," said Lionel, with the most perfect respect; "you are too sensible a woman, and too good a mother, not to know that Victorine has the first right to my communications, and I shall wait until she may choose to call me to account."

"That's not to be gainsayed," replied the old duchess, laughing good-humouredly; "it means, 'Be quiet, you have no business to meddle in the matter!'"

"This may not be the case with *all*, however," retorted the maréchale, sharply. "The king has punished the personal affront, in which light he regarded your conduct, with the disgrace of your family; and that family, which was never so visited before, has a just right to investigate a proceeding which has brought upon it consequences so injurious."

"Force not from me now this explanation," cried Lionel, with a wildness in his look and manner which frightened all present. "I am ready to give it—perhaps it would be better—for I can now never be at peace with myself again. But you—you, my mother—you are the last person who ought to drive me to it."

Madame de Crécy felt that she had gone too far; but she never suffered an affront to herself to

pass unpunished ; and should she submit to receive one from her son, who now, for the first time, dared to defy her ? It was too much to endure ; and yet she felt that she had herself driven him to the very point from which she wished to keep him.

“ You might, at least, feel,” said she, making an effort to control herself, “ that the moment is ill chosen for your petulance towards me. I am the widow of your father ; you will perhaps recollect that the corpse of that renowned and lately disgraced man is still above ground, and that I am your mother.”

Lionel stood darkly brooding during this artful speech, which it seemed uncertain whether he had heard or not, when he felt a light hand laid upon his shoulder ; and a voice, which had power to recall him to himself, said, in gentle and feeble accents, “ Do not think, my dear husband, that in *me* you will find any feeling either of anger or of curiosity. If you concede any claim to me, as I thought I heard just now, let it be that of a confidence too entire to require any explanations. But compose yourself now. The grief which it is so natural you should feel ought to make us forbearing towards you ; perhaps, too, we all stand in need of forbearance,” added she, with a faltering voice, “ we have all suffered much !”.

Lionel looked with tenderness and sympathy at the handsome, noble countenance, now so pale and

full of suffering. He led her back to her seat, and knelt by her side. "Dear, noble-minded Victorine," sighed he, pressing her hand to his forehead, "You are the only one who have any right to be angry with me; but you will be the angel who weeps over the fallen." She wept already.

The Duke de Lesdiguières, who had listened with a feeling of embarrassment to this domestic scene, now taking up the one point in it which he thought he had understood, and approaching his son-in-law, said: "From the gracious reception which his majesty vouchsafed to me when I announced the demise of the Marshal de Crécy-Chabanne, I feel almost convinced that there is good reason to hope for a restoration of royal favour; and, if Victorine uses her influence with the kind queen, that the king will replace you in your situation in her majesty's household."

Lionel thus learnt, for the first time, that he had lost it; and the maréchale, expecting symptoms of irritation, observed him closely. He, however, rose quietly from his knees, and thanking the duke in the most respectful manner for his kind sympathy, added: "I must, however, decidedly decline any such offer from his majesty. My dismissal from court was still unknown to me, though justly merited; but not being aware of it, I had already resolved to entreat the king to grant it."

"Entreat the king to grant it!" exclaimed the duke and the maréchale simultaneously.

"I am determined," continued Lionel, "after I shall have consulted with my wife upon my more immediate concerns, and fulfilled all the duties which my new situation here imposes upon me, to join Marshal Luxembourg, and, as I could not now solicit a commission, to serve under him as a volunteer in the war.

"In the war—in the war?" faltered Victorine, whilst all shewed unequivocal signs of surprise.

"Do not alarm yourself, dearest Victorine," said Lionel, bestowing all his attention upon her alone. "It must be evident to you than an extraordinary and unexpected stroke of destiny has overwhelmed me. May God forgive those who urged me on against my duty and my conscience! I cannot yet. Still less in this place can I discuss these matters with you, Victorine. Perhaps the exertions of an active life, and the endurance of the hardships of war, may be the means of saving me. Perhaps I may return more worthy of you. Now your presence is a continual reproach to me: I am unable to bear it."

"Enough!" cried the maréchale, with all her former impetuosity, and beside herself with rage at the indiscreet speech of her son, of which he himself seemed to be hardly conscious. "You appear to have returned to us in so extraordinary a

state of excitement, that you are incapable of judging of the importance of what you are saying. I can no longer bear to hear my son sacrifice to a moment of perverse humour all the weightiest interests of his future life. A few of the most intimate friends of the marshal are awaiting us: it is time we should join them."

"In that case I will beg to take my leave," said Lionel. "I will no longer vex you with my perverse humour, which, it seems, runs contrary to your designs. Time will shew whether it be a state of temporary excitement."

Bowing respectfully to all, he spoke a few words of warm affection to Victorine, and withdrew.

In order to look into the minds of the three persons principally concerned in the painful occurrences of this evening, we must visit them in the privacy of their apartments, released from the restraints of society.

Madame de Crécy had undressed, and her attendants waited in the ante-room. She listened for the shutting of the door, which was a signal for the solitude she so greatly needed. Five minutes later, we should scarcely recognise that Maréchale de Crécy who had just dismissed her women with composed dignity. The passions which she had been obliged to curb, and which during the late eventful time had become more impetuous than ever, now broke forth unrestrained. She paced

her room with quick, uneven steps, whilst the convulsive clenching of her hands expressed the violent agitation of her mind. Soon she sank into her chair, and a short passionate sob burst from her.

The maréchale, who had never permitted any one to have an opinion or a purpose of his own, who had laid out her whole life to the sole end of the exercise of her will, using those individuals whom chance brought into her way as her tools, without any regard to their interests, but considering her own alone;—she who, by the hitherto invincible and eminent success of her efforts, had acquired so secure a confidence in their infallibility, that she had reached the highest pinnacle of presumptuous pride,—suddenly, as if the ground had given way under the fabric she had deemed so securely built, she saw it crumble to atoms, and sink into the earth, leaving her stripped of all the fruits of her plotting, calculating life.

The punishment she had sustained was to her the most severe that could be inflicted, and she felt it accordingly.

During these bitter hours she strove to devise some scheme of vengeance. But the offence, which had infused so deadly a venom into her very heart's blood, recalled to her thoughts the adversary who had occasioned the many vexations she had experienced, and that adversary was her son— the son whom she had brought up for her service, for

the advancement of her ambitious schemes. He it was, who, on a sudden shewing symptoms of his parentage, had obstinately opposed his own will to hers. She thought over every method by which it might still be possible to humble and subdue him, and again to subject him to her will. She had reckoned with certainty upon this before she saw him ; she was prepared for his anger, and had expected that a full and complete explanation must be given before a reconciliation could be hoped for ; but now he had returned in a temper that neither sought nor desired explanation or reconciliation. She could not bring to mind any point that she could concede to him. One feeble hope alone remained to her : either Souvré had been himself deceived, or he had deceived her. She had, indeed, received the account of Flora's death before Lionel's marriage, which he evidently did not believe. He charged her with the crime of having driven him to the guilt of a double marriage. This error must be rectified. Her only hope rested on the repentance he would feel for having wronged her. But this was not a pillow on which the maréchale could find sleep.

From the recesses of her privacy we adjourn to the quiet bed-chamber from which Victorine had also dismissed her attendants, in order to pass the first hours of the night alone with her infant, in the unrestrained contemplation of her position. There

are some persons who, from superiority of mind, retain their composure under all circumstances ; even in solitude and when most deeply agitated, they preserve their calmness and self-command. Such was the case with Victorine. She respected herself ; she was to herself the confidential friend by whom we know we shall not be misunderstood, and whose approbation, as it is the most difficult of attainment, we are the most anxious to gain.

She knelt down and bent over the sleeping infant. Her deep-drawn sighs expressed the relief she experienced from the removal of the constraint under which she had so long suffered. She wept long and bitterly, and finally poured forth the feelings of her heart in earnest prayer. When she arose she said to herself, "I have a home, I have a child. I will preserve both for the honour of God and of man ; and when *he* returns, weary and faint-hearted, to the home he has forsaken, he shall find forbearance and forgiveness."

When she summoned her attendants, her words were soft and kind. A peaceful calm pervaded her mind, and she felt conscious of strength to perform the task she had allotted to herself.

It was not thus with Lionel. His situation, which was made up of contradictions—misery and happiness, guilt and innocence—required the energy of a strong mind to apprehend it, to sift the good from the evil, to retain the one and cast away the

other, and then to start afresh. But it was not thus that Lionel acted. He thought only of escape from his present difficulties, without any consideration for the future. The consequences of this weakness were immediately apparent. Obstacles arose on every side, which still further embittered him, and the repose for which he yearned was more distant than ever. He was displeased with the whole world. He had lost the gentleness and good-nature which used to distinguish him. His servants could not recognise their former master. He was restless, hasty, unjust; nothing seemed to give him satisfaction; he ordered and counter-ordered; he blamed without reason, and seemed constantly to seek cause for offence.

Under these circumstances, the maréchale obtained only that part of her object which was least important to her. She succeeded in convincing him that both she and Souvré had believed in the reality of Flora's death. But this did not cause him to relent towards her. Her guilt, and still more the harshness of which it was the excuse, and which had now become natural to him, had caused an entire breach with her, whom he had hitherto feared so slavishly; and the maréchale felt, that, even had she been less culpable than she really was, the position he had taken up against her protected him from self-reproach, and that he was

thus maintained in it by the very weakness which she had fostered.

The result of this explanation was, however, the prevention of an intended duel with Souvré. This skilful manœuvrer reaped the full enjoyment of his success, when, reclining at his ease in an arm-chair in Lionel's apartment, he saw him struggling with the irritable temper produced by his destroyed peace. He pondered over the result of his labours, and coolly reckoned them up:—the blooming, handsome young man, pale, bent, and grey before his time;—the distinguished nobleman, banished from court, and mocked by the magnificence of an empty palace;—his wife, beautiful, high-born, and dishonoured;—his lawful heir bastardised;—and the once brilliant favourite of fortune now torn from the corpse of his murdered wife, and the sight of his legitimate and disowned son, laden with grief, and deprived by his own deeds of peace and happiness for evermore.

It was not difficult to arrange the affairs of Lionel after the burial of the marshal; for, his presence being kept secret, he was spared much wearisome ceremonial. We need scarcely mention what was Victorine's conduct towards him at this crisis. She clearly perceived her duty, and resolved to pursue it without obtruding any pretensions of conscious heroism.

Whether Lionel duly appreciated the full merit

of this conduct, it would be difficult to say ; but it is certain that he sought the company of his wife, although even when with her he would often relapse into the gloomy thoughts of which every feature bore the impress. He appeared particularly overcome whenever he was invited to notice his child ; and the observation of the nurses was excited by his agitation. Victorine, therefore, renounced this pleasure, and courageously repressed the misgivings of her heart.

No change had taken place in Lionel's situation with respect to the court. According to established custom, the family did not leave the house during the mourning ; therefore the maréchale had not any opportunity of proving how far the death of her husband had operated towards a reconciliation. On the eighth day, according to rule, the court officials paid a short visit of ceremony at the Hôtel Soubise. This must, of course, have taken place by command of their majesties, and was a token of favour, which, as has been shewn, acted as a signal for all the nobility ; and, so far as the circumstances admitted, there was every appearance of their being restored to their former footing. The maréchale, however, who was well versed in the gradations of court favour, was not to be deceived on this point : she could not put up with a secondary place, who had hitherto enjoyed the highest.

Lionel obstinately adhered to his resolution to seek no favours at present, and to trust to the kindness of Marshal Luxembourg to vindicate his appearance at the army: and as the maréchale was herself apprehensive of failure, he met with less opposition than he had expected; and, after giving unlimited authority over all his concerns to his wife,—thus proving to her his high esteem and confidence,—he at length left his home, and joined the army of the Lower Rhine, at a moment when its success was rather critical.

## CHAPTER X.

FIVE years had elapsed. The peace of Nimeguen was concluded, and the armies had returned to France. The troops had returned to their own homes and were scattered through the provinces, though the army had not been disbanded, for Louis XIV. had formerly found the impolicy of such a step; and as the rest of Europe had not the means of following his example, he continued to be regarded as a formidable adversary, whose friendship was purchased by obsequiousness, and whose arrogance was thus swollen and confirmed.

After a separation of five years, Lionel returned to his family as aide-de-camp to Marshal Luxembourg. The maréchale held the situation of mistress of the robes to the Princess Palatine, the Duke of Orleans' second wife. She lived almost constantly at court, although with as much liberty as she could desire. But the court became more and more the shrine at which she worshiped: the focus of all her schemes and aspirations. The triumph she had obtained over her enemies, by her high ap-

pointment, encouraged her in the hope of seeing her family reinstated in its former grandeur ; for, owing to the ambiguous position of her son, it still continued under a cloud. Although the despatches from the army contained the most favourable accounts of Lionel's conduct, courage, and intrepidity, no opportunity could ever be found of bringing them before the king. Out of this magic circle all complimented the proud mother, but in the king's presence all were silent ; for it was known to every one that Madame, in her blunt German manner, (which had gained great favour with Louis,) had once attempted to introduce the subject, when the king had looked at her with as much astonishment as if she had spoken to him in German, gave her no answer, and turned his back.

The great generals had now re-assembled around the monarch, who, gratified and elevated by the renown of his armies, lavished honours, gifts, and favours of every kind upon his brave warriors. The taking of Maestricht and the battle of Mont-castel, just before the peace, to the conclusion of which they had been mainly accessory, gave the Marshal de Luxembourg new and indisputable claims upon the favour of his sovereign. He it was, therefore, who broke the ice when no one else would venture ; and he requested permission to present to the king his aide-de-camp, the Count

de Crécy-Chabanne, who had saved his life upon the field of battle at Montcastel.

The form of this request was well chosen to suit the despotic temper of Louis: it recalled nothing connected with the past, which was left to his arbitrary will; and by granting the permission, the favour appeared to be to the marshal alone, and one which could not be refused without hurting him. He therefore bowed assent, and immediately conversed upon the event, inquiring of the duke upon what occasion he had been in so great danger.

The marshal had now an opportunity of extolling Lionel's services, which he did with the utmost tact, avoiding any expression of opinion, but what appeared unavoidable in representing the facts as they occurred. The king felt persuaded that his intentions were unknown to the court and concealed within his own breast, whilst all had already made sure that Lionel would have the happiness of a gracious reception. He did indeed cross the prohibited threshold of the royal audience-chamber, and enter it as one of the privileged; but the king, though he could not have failed to observe him in the circle, appeared to overlook him. As he passed Marshal Luxembourg, however, and saw his dejected countenance, he exclaimed, "Ah, marshal! we were to be made acquainted with the preserver of your life."

Lionel bent the knee ; the king looked at him for a moment in silence, then bade him rise, and spoke to him as to a perfect stranger: he commended his bravery, but shewed not the smallest sign of having ever seen him before. Humiliating as this was, it was still to be considered as a favour to Lionel ; the confirmation of his rank as colonel was also granted to the duke without any objection, which promotion was not to detach him from the personal staff of his general.

The queen received him without any signs of displeasure. Victorine had resumed her place as lady of the bed-chamber without objection, and she would have found it impossible to shew any severity towards her husband.

In the meantime Lionel, in his first moment of leisure, hastened to St. Sulpice. He reached the grated door in a state of inexpressible emotion : on gaining admittance, he did not, however, proceed towards the seminary, but turned to the left, and was soon threading the cloistered passages ; in one of which a lay-brother, who led the way before him, opened the door of Fénélon's cell.

Lionel stopped on the threshold and drew a long breath. It was towards evening — the sun shone with softened brilliancy through the vine trellis into the open window. Fénélon was seated on a wooden stool before a plain table covered with books and writing materials. On a low bench

by his side stood a boy of seven years old, reading, as Fénélon pointed, in a Latin breviary. The child's back was turned to him ; but the sight of his glossy auburn curls was sufficient to tell him that Flora's child stood before him. Fénélon stretched out his hand over the boy to his expected visitor. The child, too, heard him enter ; he looked at his teacher, then quickly turned his head round, saw the stranger, and, with a spring, jumped off the bench. Lionel was in a state of ecstacy, but mute from emotion at the sight of his son. He durst not press him to his heart, which was overflowing at once with unbounded joy and the most poignant grief at the sight of him. There were Flora's deep blue eyes, the delicate oval face, with the pretty dimpled chin ; the red lips and smiling mouth, with its row of small white teeth ; the expression, half serious and half playful, and the gloriously brilliant colouring. It was the fac-simile of her face, when, still scarcely emerged from childhood, he had first seen her.

The boy wore a page's dress of pale blue silk, with an open shirt, which, from the heat of the day, had been turned back from his shoulders and bosom. The instant he had jumped to the ground, he seized hold of his cap, and made his little bow : —one that no dancing-master could teach, but which inborn refinement and the natural grace and beauty of childhood alone could prompt.

There, again, were Flora's indescribable charms of grace and feeling combined.

"Recover yourself," said Fénelon, mildly, to Lionel, "and embrace the child of your sainted friend." Then turning to the boy: "Reginald," said he, "this gentleman is your guardian, whom you love so much because he allows you to be educated here."

"I thought so!" exclaimed Reginald, and in a moment he had sprung up and flung his arms round Lionel's neck. And now he pressed him to his bosom, and could dare to kiss him, and call him by names of endearment, and he shed over him the first tears which had fallen from his long dry and tearless eyes.

We must now relate how he came here. When Reginald had completed his fourth year, the vicar informed Amy Gray that it was time that her charge of him should cease. But he spoke in vain; she would not give up the child, and conceived the most violent hatred against the vicar and his sister, who tried, in the kindest manner, to persuade her of the expediency of this step. Reginald had made vigorous growth in body and mind; but Amy kept him like a bird in a cage, and, as she could neither read nor write herself, she was incompetent to instruct him in the first rudiments. She had nothing to reply to their representations, but this made her only the more headstrong; and the brother and

sister being resolved not to give up Flora's child, addressed themselves to the Count de Crécy himself, although he was still with the army.

In consequence of their communication, Lionel determined to put into execution a scheme which he had for some time been revolving in his mind. He entered into a correspondence with Fénélon concerning the education of his son. There was a small number of boarders admitted into the monastery of St. Sulpice, who enjoyed the advantages of superior instruction and moral guidance from the monks. Lionel besought Fénélon to receive Reginald as one of these; but he met with a decided refusal. Fénélon positively declined implicating himself in the mysterious business: he said it was most painful to him to be made acquainted with a secret upon which the happiness of Victorine's life depended, and though he had not been able to avoid hearing so much of it, he would have nothing to do with it. Lionel, however, desisted not from his entreaties, and at length obtained the consent of Fénélon; but only upon condition that neither Victorine nor the child himself should ever know that Lionel was his father.

Fénélon plainly signified that he did not consider Lionel's first marriage as valid. He required him, however, to make a liberal settlement upon the child, but by no further concessions to awaken false expectations in his mind; and Lionel yielded.

The vicar received a letter from Fénélon with Lionel's decision. M. St. Albans, the old castellan of St. Roche, took the lovely child almost by force from the arms of the disconsolate Amy Gray, and consigned him safely to those of Fénélon.

Lionel left it to Amy to choose whether she would return to her own country or remain at St. Roche. She rejected the first alternative with scorn. She had never loved any thing but Flora. She thought of John Gray, and even of her little girl, with aversion. She often said, "I never can love any thing again. What have they to do with me?" She remained in the castle in charge of the rooms which her darling had once inhabited, and continued inaccessible to, and at enmity with, all the world.

The noble child, meantime, grew and prospered under Fénélon's judicious care. He received his instructions with eager delight, and his teacher soon felt for him affection so cordial and tender, that he undertook to take him entirely under his own tuition.

As soon as Lionel had stilled the throbings of his heart and regained his tranquillity, Fénélon informed him that Victorine, who came to perform her devotions at St. Sulpice, had requested him to admit her son as one of the boarders. He had delayed giving any decided answer till the count's return, wishing to inquire what his feelings upon the

subject might be. Lionel immediately and joyfully acquiesced in this plan, which gave him the soothing hope that the brothers, being brought up together, might be united in affection.

“This promising child,” said Fénélon, “inspired Victorine with the wish of seeing the two boys attached to one another; for her son Louis is of a more timid nature, and of inferior abilities.”

This intelligence was the first comfort that Lionel’s forlorn heart had received, and he returned to Victorine a different creature. She was deeply touched when she found that the change was to be ascribed to the pleasure with which he had heard of her plan for the education of their son, and which he seemed to take in discussing it with her.

“God be praised, he still loves his child!” said she, with tears of joy, when she found herself alone. “This feeling will become the bridge by which the gulf that flows between us may be crossed.”

There were at this time festivities in the family, from which Lionel could not withdraw his presence. Louise de Crécy’s marriage was now to take place with the young Marquis d’Anville, who had served through the campaign, and at the conclusion of the peace returned to his family. Louise’s happiness added to the fervency of her attachment for her brother. She could not comprehend why her

Lionel, once so lively, had become so grave and gloomy. She clung to him with the sanguine hope of youth, that she would be able to cheer him, and Lionel was obliged to shew some sympathy in her joy, to avoid giving pain to the affectionate girl; besides that, being the head of the family, it was incumbent upon him to take a prominent part on the occasion. A handsomer couple could not be seen at that time than the Marquis d'Anville and his bride: the court took the most flattering interest in the wedding, and Le Brun immortalised it by a splendid picture.

After the bridal festivities were over, the young couple left the court, and Lionel had time to conclude the arrangements for his son's admission to St. Sulpice. It was not long before he saw his fond hopes realised. The two boys became warmly attached to each other; the affection, especially of Louis for Reginald, almost amounted to enthusiasm; for, whether it was from the latter being a year older, or from the striking difference in their characters, their relation to each other unconsciously assumed the character of protector and protected.

We must here break off the thread of the narrative, which we have followed step by step up to this point. In the history of all families there are periods unmarked by events. Such a void now

apparently occurred. We will, therefore, resume our narrative at the time when we have to record fresh events, resulting from those already related, and paving the way for fresh catastrophes.

## CHAPTER XI.

ALTHOUGH Fénélon no longer personally superintended the task of instruction at St. Sulpice, (for, aware of his great talents, the king, after employing him on many important missions, had raised him to the archbishopric of Cambray,) yet he still kept an eye upon all that passed there, and more especially upon Reginald and Louis, whose education he now pronounced to be completed.

Reginald had attained his one-and-twentieth, Louis his twentieth year; and Fénélon advised, that, united as they were in heart, they should not be separated, but should be sent to travel together. This proposal met with the fullest approbation both of the Count de Crécy and of his wife. It was welcome to the count, as deferring the dreaded moment when Reginald (who hitherto, under the title of Chevalier de St. Roche, and as his ward, had been prevented from asking any questions as to his real situation) should enter upon a new period of his life, which must of necessity lead to the inquiry, what position he was to occupy with regard to the world. Although the Count de

Crécy had had one and twenty years to reflect upon and prepare himself for this moment, yet, in accordance with his character, he had let it approach without having ever found an answer to this question ; and, while quieting his conscience by the liberality with which he provided equally for the two young men, he had only determined that Reginald should retain the enjoyment of the same abundant wealth, leaving the means by which this was to be effected to his old resource, chance. It is to be supposed that his wife had also reason to be satisfied with Fénélon's advice, since we are aware of the full confidence she reposed in her former instructor : but the secret history of the twenty years that had elapsed had, except in some important points, led her nearer and nearer to the truth, and taught her to suspect that Reginald had claims upon her husband, which she endeavoured silently to protect and advance. This undoubtedly arose from an impulse of her noble and generous nature ; but partly also, we must confess, from a desire to avoid anything like an explanation or substantiation of them, for she was conscious that this would exceed the limits of her self-control. She trembled at the thought of being made acquainted with this unhappy secret, and was doubtful whether in that event she could or ought longer to endure the presence of Reginald ; for her imagination never went so far as to give

her the slightest suspicion of the validity of his claims.

The Count de Crécy thus found himself at liberty to let things take their own course, and was even encouraged to do so by his wife.

The really remarkable fact, that Reginald bore the name of St. Roche, the property which belonged exclusively to the count, never struck her as singular. She had so accustomed herself to look upon Reginald as a member of her family, and was so firmly persuaded that the property belonged to him, that by this belief many further questions as to his parentage and rights were silenced or set aside.

The maréchale was also compelled to be silent on the subject of measures which had at first filled her with indignation, as far too favourable to the youth whose claims she obstinately persisted in denying even to herself. For after her daughter-in-law had suffered all her hints to pass unheeded, a more direct attack called forth such a vehement burst of uncontrolled anger, coupled with such menacing expressions from Victorine, that she immediately perceived that a clearer explanation would drive the countess to the most extreme measures, which she would even think herself in duty bound to adopt. Thus the maréchale was compelled, not only to pass over the personal affronts she had received from her indignant daugh-

ter-in-law, but even to assume the office of pacificator, so that the countess's peace was secured in this quarter also. Fénélon, on the other hand, endeavoured, with the utmost gentleness, to guide and support his noble pupil under her trial ; though, even in the confessional, the secret of her burthened heart was never breathed. The confidence of her sorrow was made in general terms ; and thus, too, was consolation bestowed by her excellent friend. They knew each other thoroughly, and, even while her feelings were thus spared, fully understood each other.

The object of so many forebodings and so much self-control meanwhile remained unconscious and careless of his situation. He believed himself to be an orphan, whose parents had been known to the Count de Crécy, who had thus become his guardian and the manager of his property ; for as such he looked upon the estate of St. Roche, of which he bore the name. He clung with filial affection to the Count de Crécy, but still more so to the countess ; for the gloomy and dispirited nature of his guardian was much less suited to his sanguine and ardent temperament than her energetic mind : and the countess, in return, loved him sincerely : she loved him with that noble impartiality which could appreciate his singular abilities : she loved him as the friend and protector of her son,

who, with a more delicate frame, was possessed also of inferior talents. In truth, Louis seemed to live and breathe only through the medium of his beloved Reginald. He was guided, supported, and animated by him; and his clear-sighted mother soon perceived the advantages of this intimate union, and was silently grateful to Reginald for a benefit unconsciously conferred by him, and amply repaid by the mutual affection of the young men for each other.

From this peaceful union one only was excepted, who, hating peace every where, hated it most in a family from which his ill-will had never been diverted; and this was the Marquis de Souvré, who, in spite of all that he had attained, was yet unsatisfied, and never lost sight of the hope of being able one day to spring the mine, which, though so cautiously concealed from all, was hollowed beneath their feet. The advance of years had, as was to be expected, only hardened him in evil. Foiled in a thousand plans of ambition, he despised all that he had gained, in order to pursue his bitter hatred against the world. He revenged the failure of any of his plans upon the whole human race. Individuals were alike to him; but every success offended him, and he opposed it to the utmost of his power. By degrees he became more occupied with this than with his own concerns; for he un-

consciously experienced the curse of guilt: indifference, or even loathing, to all the advantages he attained.

Since the death of the queen, he had paid his court to Madame de Maintenon, and belonged to her circle, where he was feared and conciliated, as he had formerly been in that of the queen or of Madame Henriette. He had received the order of St. Esprit and the chamberlain's key; and Louis XIV. never failed to say, when he saw him, "What news has our lively marquis to impart to us?" He was compelled to acknowledge that he could scarcely hope to rise higher. His character assumed consistency in the direction in which he had turned it, and he looked upon mankind with unbounded contempt, as the passive tools of his designs. It is easy to perceive that the Marquis de Souvré had employed life according to the purpose which he had marked out for himself in his youth. But there was one passage in his career which he could never recall without an involuntary shudder, and that was the vision of Flora. All his endeavours to deny her immeasurable superiority, to regard her with derision or contempt, were unavailing, when, in his unguarded moments, the scene would arise upon his recollection, in which she stood before him, like an angel of light, wielding the fiery sword of justice, and with holy awe and compassion unfolding to him his own condi-

tion ; when, conquered by the power of truth, he had recognised himself, and a conviction of guilt, which he had always denied, forced itself irresistibly upon his mind. It was his punishment to recollect every word, every movement, every feature of her face. He stood paralysed before this mental vision ; he could not close his ears to the sound of her voice, nor withdraw his gaze from her, until she expired, as he then believed, before his eyes. He had never experienced anything similar. Her death had failed to gratify his revenge ; he felt, on the contrary, as if his vengeance had returned upon himself. He had fled the spot, urged to flight by a power stronger than his own, and bearing with him a burden of execration and contempt which he never thought to have endured, and for which he felt that he had been unable to revenge himself. Even after years had elapsed, the recollection of this period of his life made Souvré start, as if at the bite of a scorpion. He could scarcely comprehend it ; but, as the feeling remained unaltered, he cast his eyes around in search of an adversary connected with this indelible impression upon his mind, and discovered him but too soon in the person of Reginald, the youth with the deep blue eyes, the lofty gaze, and the halo of clustering locks of golden brown. When this youth, whose presence constantly excited all the demons of his frivolous mind, suddenly turned his calm and serious gaze

upon him, he again felt the power of the thunder-bolt which Flora had hurled upon him ; and when, in the midst of his rage and hatred, he felt a fascination as if the evil spirit within him quailed before that earnest eye, he inwardly vowed that he would crush the only opposing power which had never yet bowed before him.

This was the one firm tie which bound him to the Maréchale de Crécy. Neither of them had stopped short on the path which they had chosen. The maréchale, like Souvré, regarded with a feeling of bitter enmity that world, in which, instead of triumphant success, she beheld nothing but the destruction of her schemes and the failure of her wishes. Although she was now advanced in age, she was subject to none of its infirmities, and having grown old amidst the forms of court etiquette, appeared but little changed. But where was now the splendour of her house, which was, at all costs, to have been maintained by her son ? He had never resumed his office in the household, and consequently never recovered his influence in the circle which she had formerly ruled. Since the death of the queen, her daughter-in-law had completely retired from court ; and as Lionel had not again followed Luxembourg to the wars, they both led a life of privacy, which the maréchale looked upon as utterly unworthy of them, and had in vain endeavoured to alter, and had occasionally interrupt-

ed only to retire again with the mortifying conviction that her influence was powerless against the gloomy self-will of her son, and the cold calmness of her daughter-in-law. They neither of them, however, sought to withdraw themselves from society in the house of the maréchale, with whom, to all appearance, they were on the best of terms. But when, urged by her constant spleen, she reflected whom she had to thank for the failure of all her schemes of ambition, her penetration led her back to the feeble obscure being whom she had so deeply despised, and had thought to crush as easily as a worm beneath her foot. Flora, whose claims she had deemed scarcely worth the trouble of refuting, had nevertheless undermined the ground on which she deemed her footing so secure, and even in her death she was avenged by the overthrow of all the plans that were based upon her destruction. From Lionel's flight on the tidings of her death, she dated the decline of the splendour of her house. When she recollects the morning of the christening, she was forced to confess that she had felt almost oppressed by the triumphant pride of her swelling heart, and within a few hours all had been changed to a degree, which, in her position, she had not considered possible.

We have here recapitulated the cause of her state of mind; in order to make more obvious the feelings with which she regarded Reginald, bearing,

as he did, the offensive surname of St. Roche ; which, although it deprived him of his real name, she regarded as a concession, for the retraction of which she ceased not to labour ; nor did she ever abandon the hope of depriving him of claims which she looked upon as degrading to her house.

As far as in her lay, she denied the very fact of his existence. She had a peculiar way of overlooking him, of never hearing him, of meeting all mention of him by others as if on this one subject she were both deaf and blind ; so that hitherto she had precluded all contact between herself and him, deeming herself thus more free, when the time should come, to employ all her powers in attacking a position which she had never recognised.

Nevertheless, she was not spared the annoyance of seeing this youth as often as her own adored grandson ; for the two young men entered into no society except the mid-day circle at the house of the Count de Crécy, in which they appeared on stated days, meeting there only their relations and intimate friends. The maréchale at length determined no longer to absent herself from these *réunions*, in order that, heedless of Reginald, she might enjoy the society of her grandson.

Bitterly as Souvré himself hated the Chevalier de St. Roche, he nevertheless found pleasure in his presence in the company of the haughty maréchale ; and he endeavoured, by a thousand arts, to shake

the firmness of the position assumed by his respected friend, and to increase the measure of indignation which was gnawing at her heart.

Reginald himself seemed precisely calculated to stimulate this feeling of ill-will. No one could be more unembarrassed, more free from care ; he did not notice any appearance of ungraciousness, for it never occurred to him as possible. Nothing, either in his appearance or his character, shewed any trace of his father ; he was the living image of his mother. His demeanour was so noble, that it was regarded by every one almost with astonishment ; his fascinating politeness, assisted by an expression of sincere kindness, made such an impression, even on those whose age and station placed them far above him, that they received it with an involuntary degree of gracious deference. Though no one could have told how it happened, yet he everywhere assumed a distinguished place ; for, without the slightest symptom of arrogance, his perfect freedom from embarrassment led him naturally to occupy the position that was conceded to him. He enjoyed all the innocent pleasures of conscious development, and appeared everywhere to find enjoyment in the free exercise of his youthful powers. He thus adapted himself, with a touching warmth of affection, to the relation in which he was placed to the Countess de Crécy and to the young Count Louis. Feeling secure of their love, he unhesitatingly

counted upon their confidence and sympathy, and gave in return, with a liberal hand, all that he possessed. The two young men were inseparable; Louis adored his young friend, and Victorine was aware that the feeling was stronger on his side than on that of Reginald, for she had long since perceived that his warmest affection was for her. Reginald had distinguished himself no less in the monastery under the care of his instructors: he was their pride and their glory. The young foreigners, especially those from England belonging to the distinguished families who had followed the fortunes of the exiled Stuarts, and some of whom obtained the privilege of entrusting their sons to the celebrated monks of St. Sulpice, all found a model in the young Chevalier de St. Roche. His superiority served as a support to them all; and, under the guidance of his noble and refined but firm character, they learnt to find enjoyment without incurring blame.

When the Maréchale de Crécy heard of the intention of sending the two young men to travel together, she once more exerted all the influence which she could claim in her son's house to prevent a step so strangely unfitting in her eyes. But neither did she succeed in this; and at length she resolved to let it pass, in order to work the more effectually for the attainment of an object of greater importance.

She reflected, that, owing to the careless and un-

worthy manner in which his parents maintained their social position, she must, as far as her advanced years would permit, shield and protect, in the person of her grandson, all that might assist him at some future time to revive the former splendours of his house ; and to this end she deemed an advantageous marriage the most effectual means. The Countess La Fayette, actuated by personal motives of family pride, encouraged these views. Her daughter, the Countess d'Aubaine, the friend of Louise de Crécy, now Marquise d'Anville, more fortunate than Louise, (who, after the loss of many children, had now at length succeeded in rearing two little boys,) was the happy mother of three children ; a son, the eldest of the family, and two blooming daughters, the eldest of whom, Françoise, was the bride destined by the maréchale for her grandson. The parents of the young Louis made no objection to this plan, only the Countess de Crécy required that nothing should be concerted beforehand, that a free choice should be allowed to the young people, and that a knowledge of the wishes of their parents should not be suffered to curb their easy and unrestrained intercourse. The maréchale acceded to these conditions with haughty indifference, and contrived that the journey, which had been fixed upon, should begin with a visit to Louise at the Château d'Arçonville, and one, in company with herself and family, to the Count

d'Aubaine at Ardoise. Thus far the Marquis de Souvré was to accompany the young men, and thence they were to proceed to England, together with a friend from the seminary of St. Sulpice, who, although considerably older than either of the youths, wished to give a finishing stroke to his already completed education, and thus became the most intimate friend of Reginald. The death of his father, in consequence of which the title of Lord Duncan of Leithmorin had devolved upon him, rendered it necessary for him to return to England, whither his friends, with the consent of the Count and Countess de Crécy, agreed to accompany him.

The Countess de Crécy bore the parting from the two youths with exemplary firmness, for the rapid decline of her health gave her a melancholy presentiment that it was a final one. But, as she released her son from her embrace, she laid Reginald's hand in his, and giving them both her blessing, "Reginald," said she, "you will be a faithful and loving friend to my son. It is with the fullest confidence that I entrust his more tender nature to your care."

What were the feelings of Reginald as he knelt before her whom he loved best on earth, and gazed upon her with glowing cheeks? He strove to answer, but could do so only by scalding tears, which he did not endeavour to conceal from her. She under-

stood him, bent over him, and imprinted a kiss of maternal affection upon his forehead.

They set out on their eventful journey, and we once more rejoin them at Ardoise, where, amidst a circle of young and amiable companions, they learned to feel the full enjoyment of youth. The Marquise d'Anville and her husband, and the Count and Countess d'Aubaine, were so highly favoured by fortune, so cheerful and free from care, that they appeared younger than their years; and, profiting by the unceremonious freedom of the country, they shared in the joyous life of their children, thus enhancing their pleasure. The young Count d'Aubaine had just completed his twentieth year, the Countess Françoise was in her sixteenth, and her young sister of fourteen was the darling of all, to whom the Marquise d'Anville's two little boys particularly attached themselves. Besides these, there was a constant succession of welcome guests; the young Lord Duncan was treated by all as one of the family, and he felt the more at home from finding amongst them two amiable countrywomen of his own. The Count d'Aubaine was under considerable obligations to the father of one of them, Miss Lester, the younger daughter of a clergyman; for, during his travels in England, the care with which this worthy man had nursed him through a dangerous illness had been the means of saving his life. They had ever since maintained a

constant correspondence, and Mr. Lester had at length yielded to the wishes of the count, by sending his daughter Margaret, who was of the same age as Françoise, for a short time to France. She was accompanied by a Miss Ellen Gray, who had been brought up with her, and, being several years older than herself, afforded her a species of protection.

Two happy months thus passed away but too quickly, and the time which had long been fixed for a separation came upon all by surprise.

But they did not part as they had met. The die was cast—amongst the sports of youth, amid the jocund hours of gaiety, at a time of life the importance of which is veiled at the moment, each had unconsciously received into his lap the lot that was to decide his future fate, and it was not until the hour of parting arrived, that they awoke to the consciousness of what had befallen them.

Here also Reginald had assumed the foremost place. He seemed to exert a magic influence over the minds of all. It was not only the young ones who relied in full confidence upon his guidance; even their parents shared the feeling. With all the elastic gaiety of youthful spirits, Reginald satisfied the claims everywhere made upon him. His personal address, displayed not only in his own service, but in that of every one else, associated him with the interests of all present. His beauty

seemed to develop itself in a higher degree ; it had acquired that expression of ardour and fire, which shews that the first stage of youth is passed, when every glance, every motion bears the stamp of the energy which longs to measure itself with the conflicting elements of life, and seeks with impatient eagerness to unveil its mysteries. Without being himself conscious of it, his conversation sparkled with wit, and with the most brilliant flow of thought and feeling. Fénelon's pupil had received an education which had developed the powers of his mind — had given it order and discipline, already affording him that groundwork of knowledge, which youth in general finds it so difficult to extract from the mass of crude material, that often clogs and fetters them through a whole lifetime, during which they vainly trust to the laboriously acquired information which they know not how to direct into knowledge. There was nothing of this in Reginald ; he had overcome the dead letter of instruction, and had gained the spirit of knowledge, which gave life and form to all which he acquired.

Louise and her husband suspected his peculiar connexion with their family ; the remarkable fact of the cession of St. Roche to him had naturally led them to this conclusion. The others were unaware of this circumstance. St. Roche, which was scarcely ever mentioned as belonging to the Crécy's,

seemed to be unknown even to the Count d'Aubaine, though situated in his neighbourhood. He therefore found no difficulty in recognising Reginald as the owner of it ; he, having been recommended to him as such by his guardian, the Count de Crécy. He was, however, the means of turning Reginald's attention towards it, who, without noticing the marked silence of his guardian as to the vicinity of what he believed to be his hereditary possessions, expressed a desire to make himself acquainted with them. The Count d'Aubaine encouraged him so much the more in this intention, that one of the young Englishwomen, Miss Ellen Gray, felt it her duty to go thither to visit her mother, who, for some unknown reason, resided there ; and it was desirable that she should have protection during the journey. But on this occasion the Marquis de Souvré interfered in the most decisive manner. He protested that this visit was quite contrary to the plan which had been laid down for their journey, and for their adherence to which he was answerable, so long, at least, as they remained in France ; and Reginald, who was always yielding and respectful to older persons, acquiesced in his decision.

Miss Ellen Gray went alone to St. Roche, and Reginald deferred the inspection of his property until his journey should be at an end, and made Ellen (whose return was expected before their de-

parture) promise to give him every possible detail concerning it ; for he was anxious to refresh the recollections of his childhood, which recalled to him a delightful residence in the midst of a forest, and a strange old castle, where he used to climb up some little steps to a tower, guarded by an old woman, who gave him beautiful fruit.

Miss Ellen Gray returned a day before the departure of the young people from Ardoise, and, as it seemed, but little pleased with her visit ; as Mrs. Gray, her mother, had evinced no pleasure at seeing her again, and had appeared more anxious to promote her departure than her longer stay. It was quite remarkable how, on her return, the Marquis de Souvré laid claim to her exclusive attention, and made the little insignificant Miss Gray, with her broken French, the object of a degree of notice which seemed as if he had now, for the first time, discovered her merits, and had raised her to the dignity of his sole companion. But the natural consequence of this marked attention was, that he always remained near her, and succeeded in foiling all her rather awkward attempts to approach Reginald. But the marquis, with all his cunning, was at length outwitted by the sly penetration of this girl, who, with a certain degree of asperity, was not wanting in resolution. She looked upon his attentions as ironical, and saw in them only a determination to separate her from her

young friends, which she defeated, by seizing the opportunity of a few moments in which the marquis was engaged in conversation with some one else, to escape from him, go without the least hesitation straight up to Reginald, drag him off with her to the library, and hastily lock the door behind them: "Listen, listen," cried she, breathlessly, "before that artful man comes after me again. My mother is the old woman who took care of you when you were a child: she conjures you not to set out on your journey without going to St. Roche; she has a great and important secret to reveal to you, upon which the whole happiness of your life depends. But she says you must come in person, and entreats you, above all things, for God's sake, to be on your guard against that villainous Marquis de Souvré, for he it was who plunged your parents into misery."

Reginald looked at the little impetuous creature, who had imparted her tidings to him with such unfeminine energy and precipitation, with an expression of displeasure which he could not control. He felt it almost impossible to give them credence. They were so mysterious, so calculated to awaken suspicion, that if he did so they threatened completely to alter his position, and the disposition of his mind. He, to whom suspicion had hitherto been an empty name, could not admit it into his heart on such grounds as these. He therefore

listened only with politeness, unable to share in Miss Gray's excitement, and at length begged her to inform her mother of the impossibility of his now coming to St. Roche, as his departure for England was fixed for the following morning, an arrangement which it was no longer in his power to alter. On his return he should, however, look upon a visit to St. Roche as one of his most pressing duties, where he should have great pleasure in renewing his acquaintance with his aged nurse.

Ellen Gray had delivered her message with a degree of eagerness and excitement, which seemed to her fully justified by the importance which she attached to it: she was mortified to find it received with coldness and without the astonishment which she had anticipated, and, with her usual sensitiveness, she was affronted.

"As you please, sir," said she, colouring scarlet. "I have merely done my duty by obeying the commands of my mother, who certainly appears to have more wisdom than most people, and is entitled by her years to lay claim to a knowledge of things of which young folks do not even dream. Now I have only to entreat your forgiveness for disturbing your last hours with the Countess Françoise."

Reginald in vain endeavoured to appease or to detain her; with a formal curtsey she hastened

away, and had rejoined the company before the marquis was aware of her short absence.

We must confess, that, of his whole interview with Miss Gray, the only thing of which Reginald retained a deep impression was her last words. His approaching departure had touched him to the heart, and forced upon him the conviction that he loved Françoise d'Aubaine with all the energy of his soul. He had that very morning obtained the assurance that his affection was returned, and he bore in his bosom the consciousness of the highest happiness, together with the pain of approaching separation. This was no moment to make a claim upon his interest in favour of that which conveyed only ideas of mistrust and of evil. He was far more anxious to throw himself into the arms of the Count d'Aubaine, and frankly urge his suit for the hand of his daughter: but the recollection of his extreme youth made him hesitate; he hoped to improve himself by travel, as he did not think himself yet worthy of the prize to which he aspired. This, too, in her alarm at her own newly-awakened feelings, had been the entreaty of the child-like Françoise; and she had decided upon a silence as sacred and as sweet as the piety of their pure and guileless hearts.

Thus, in the company of Lord Duncan, Louis and Reginald left Ardoise, which they were not to see again for two years; and it must be owned